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THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE



A NOVEL

BY

ANGELINA TEAL



ILLUSTRATED



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"JOHN THORN'S FOLKS," etc.

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THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

CHAPTER I

The capital of a state is, in many essential respects, a reduced copy of the national capital. The machinery of government is the sentient soul of the city, and the various departments, legislative, executive and judicial, send the electric currents of their active life through every avenue of business and society. As years pass, these capital cities develop new features, becoming educational or manufacturing centers, but the convening of the legislature, and the inauguration of a new governor continue to be their distinguishing events, in which, as cities, they never lose interest.

When sturdy Luke Townley took the oath of office which made him chief of a great commonwealth, a change of administration in both nation and state inspired with a new and eager life that strange organism, the body politic. The fourth

of January was a day of wind and snow, but at the inaugural there was an immense assemblage of spectators, interested, curious or idle. The ceremonies of the hour took place in the rotunda of the capitol, one of the finest state buildings on the continent. The national colors wreathed the marble columns, and hung in heavy festoons from balustrade and frieze.

Above the heads of the group assembled on the rostrum, hung from an eagle's talons the great seal of the commonwealth, done in gold on a broad field of heavy turquoise satin. The noted Third Infantry Band, and a band from the incoming governor's home town showered music alternately, upon the waiting assemblage, till at a certain signal, the two houses of the legislature moved from their respective chambers. A glimpse of the procession could be had from the lower court, as the men filed along a high corridor on the farther side of the rotunda. They were reduced in size and looked like an animated fresco, so great are the distances in this magnificent building.

Presently the senators and representatives entered in pairs, and took the seats reserved for

them in front of the rostrum. Then the oath was administered by Judge Bainbridge, following which the new governor read his inaugural address. He spoke to the General Assembly, scheduling the winter's work before them. It was a strong paper, terse and to the point. At its close, comments upon the man and his speech were in free circulation. Citizens of the city and visitors from a distance united in commending Governor Townley's evident honesty of purpose.

At the close of the governor's address, the lieutenant governor was sworn, and read his inaugural, a brief and somewhat humorous essay. Then the out-going ex-governor made a short speech full of kindness and good will, and the ceremonies of the afternoon were over.

While the crowd was still pouring out of the State House doors, workmen appeared upon the scene, ready to remove the staging and seats, and clear the wide, tessellated floor, for the inaugural ball that night.

Most of the members of the new legislature were present at the ball. Many of them were first termers, standing about awkwardly enough,

in their suits of business cut, and thick shoes, all glaringly new. But the most unfortunate and really unhappy personage at this public function is the wife of the new country member. As the tiresome evening wears on, she is able to think of but one compensating feature of the situation—the fact of the social superiority which she will in future enjoy. This will be tacitly accorded to her by her neighbors on account of her having spent a week or two at the seat of government, and participated in its bewildering gaieties.

Inside the ring of interested though weary spectators, was a splendid floor for dancing, and scores of elegant couples wound in and out amongst each other, to the strains of witching waltz-music. The dancers rested from time to time on the stairs. Those wide stairways became glowing pastures of human flowers. Such bloom and brightness! Such dazzling smiles! Such bewildering effects of stylish dress and dainty coiffure!

It is a western scene we are looking upon, but it is not on that account “wild and woolly.” There is an invisible meridian on the great seas,

where the east ends and the west begins; but the waves do not feel it, as a barrier. No more are the ever-changing currents of social life in this great republic conscious of degrees of longitude. The boor and the scholar jostle each other across the width of the continent. So do the satin-shod dame, with her liveried servants, and the educated and thoroughly respectable wife of the day-laborer; and a process of rapid social evolution, as remarkable as the wonders of electricity, has appeared to startle the onlookers of other countries.

A large and handsomely appointed parlor was comprised in the governor's suite of rooms, and there the new Executive received the members of the Assembly and the public at large, that January night. He stood near the center of the room, a tall, rosy, silver-haired man of sixty, supported by a little group of men and ladies.

At his right stood his married daughter, Mrs. Froude, and her next friend, Miss Norgate.

Of the gentlemen in the receiving party, the one who would especially challenge attention was Bruce Fontaine, the just elected speaker of the house. That he was a prime favorite with

the governor could readily be guessed, and there was something fine in the dignified yet cordial deference which characterized the manner of the younger man toward the elder. Mr. Fontaine, as a prominent attorney, had a somewhat extensive acquaintance throughout the State. He knew something about the majority of the senators and representatives, and as they came up to shake the governor's hand, he could name them promptly, and would sometimes add a word of contemporaneous history.

"Mr. Collins, Governor, comes up this session, as a joint from Wells and Tyburn." And again:

"Mr. Vigo is the gentleman who rescued old Hartley County from the enemy, two years ago, you remember."

For an hour or two in the early part of the evening, Fontaine assisted in this manner. Then he yielded his place to another gentleman, a large, well-made man, with a genial, open face, a fluent tongue and a manner somewhat nervous and mercurial in contrast with the speaker's quiet dignity. Mr. McNulty was a lawyer, resident in the capital, and represented a city district in the Assembly.

When Fontaine signaled him, he had himself just received an ocular telegram from Miss Norgate. She had disengaged herself from the receiving party, and was standing near the parlor door, when Fontaine left the governor's side. He went to her and offered his arm; she placed her hand in it and steered straight in the direction of the dancers. He hung back slightly, saying with a low laugh:

"Edith, you are too bad! Possibly you have heard something like this—'You may lead a horse to water, but you can not make him drink!'"

"Fie, Bruce!" the lady exclaimed. "You remember what you said, that night in August, by the sad sea waves—if we got the president and the governor, and you got the speakership, you would dance with me at this ball."

"But it seems ridiculous. There are so many people here who know I never dance. Indeed I have forgotten how."

"I'll risk it. There are some things one never forgets." He laughed again, half in vexation. They drew nearer and nearer to the charmed circle. The girl's foot caught the rhythm of the music. At the right time he laid his hand upon

her waist, and they glided into the maze of whirling couples. It was a proud moment for Edith Norgate.

For those at the ball, who wished to indulge in a little quiet talk, no place was better than the state library. The room was softly lighted, the electric rays falling through tinted globes, and losing themselves in book-lined alleys and transepts. Two ladies occupied easy chairs near the entrance. They were beautiful middle-aged ladies, with faultless toilets, gracefully rounded wrists and slender hands, and gray hair curling softly above clear, unlined foreheads.

They were speaking of Mr. Fontaine. A few minutes before, he had entered the library with Miss Norgate. They had chatted awhile with Mrs. Eberly, a candidate for state librarian, and the three had gone out together, probably to the refreshment room.

"I never expected to see Bruce Fontaine in a place of gaiety like this," said Mrs. Colby, wife of one of the supreme judges. "He has danced several times to-night, once with your sister. It seems so strange, when for years he has declined to take the place in society which always stands open to him, both here and at Colton."

"I think," said Mrs. Hollis, "if Miss Norgate takes him in hand, he will be seen at parties in future. She seems to assume command of him to-night."

"His prominence would make her wish to do that," Mrs. Colby remarked. "His election to the speakership was a sort of triumph. The judge says the matter was hotly contested, the majority side of the House caucusing for two days and nights."

"She likes to garland the hero, and lead him by the garland."

"Yes," said Mrs. Colby, "but the hero is not used to chains, even of roses." A little later she drifted out on a sea of narrative.

"I shall never forget that night, nine years ago, when Mrs. Fontaine died. It was a dreadful scene! They were both so young, she only nineteen and he a boy of three-and-twenty. She had not been quite well, and had been under the care of Madame Sylvestre, a doctress who used to live on Baker street. The girl listened wholly to her mother and aunt, and they kept Bruce in total ignorance of everything. When that night of terror came, and I was called in as a discreet

neighbor, and the family physician was summoned, and Mrs. Lombard went wild with grief when they told her Louise was dying—then the whole truth flashed upon the boy in an instant. Such words of righteous wrath as he hurled at those stricken women, when all was over! They had killed his wife, they and the heartless social order to which they belonged. Mrs. Lombard cried:

“‘Have you no pity, Bruce?’ And he replied:

“‘No, only curses for those who have persuaded my innocent girl to her death!’

“I fairly dragged him from the room, and then when alone with me, he broke down sobbing. I tried to soften his anger against the mother, by telling him I believed she really thought Louise too young and delicate for the cares of maternity.

“‘Then,’ said he, ‘she should have opposed the marriage, or forbidden it. She did neither.’

“I soothed him, as one does an angry, injured child, and he has always looked at me since that night, with a strange look, pathetic and remembering.”

“Where are the Lombards, now?” asked Mrs. Hollis.

"In California, I believe. Mrs. Lombard fell into bad health some three years ago, and they left the city. Fontaine never spoke to her, after the day of his wife's funeral, till just before they went away. She sent for him, and they parted with a semblance of friendliness."

"She was a shallow, selfish woman," said Mrs. Hollis, "incapable of understanding the man whose youth she spoiled."

"His youth was spoiled," said Mrs. Colby earnestly. "The effect upon his character, of that early bereavement, or rather of the circumstances attending it, was most unfortunate. For a long time he was very morose and cynical, and my husband says his distrust of women, and in particular his hatred of society women, has many a time been apparent in his law-practice. So you can understand my surprise at seeing him in a ball-room."

"He may marry again."

"In that case," said Mrs. Colby, "it will be Edith Norgate, and she will marry him."

CHAPTER II.

"I wonder if any of those farmer-looking men ever dance. If they ever did, they cannot to-night, on account of their shoes."

"What made you think of that? Should you like one of them for a partner?"

"Not particularly; indeed not at all. But one gets so tired of boys, and all the best dancers seem to be boys."

The boy to whom she spoke laughed good-naturedly

"You are the oddest girl! You always say just what you think."

"I'm afraid I do. Everybody says so, and say it as though it was a little worse than odd. I can't see why."

The speaker was a girl of three and twenty, with large eyes set in a rather dark face, whose striking peculiarity was its fluctuating color. The peachy bloom of the cheeks would not stay, but now and then disappeared, leaving the soft

brunette skin quite pale, relieved only by those glowing eyes and scarlet lips. Hair of an indescribable shade of brown, which likewise changed with every changing light, was parted in a distinct white line from crown to forehead; from this line it curled and rippled back into a loose Grecian knot. She wore a gown of lemon-yellow silk with garnitures of black lace.

Her companion, Mr. Clarence Vanderlip, was a handsome, blond youth, faultlessly dressed, from his tie of creamy crepe to the toe of his patent leather dancing-shoe.

"Yonder comes a fellow old enough for you," said Vanderlip.

"Who is he?" she asked.

"Mr. Fontaine, the new speaker of the house. My uncle is going to introduce him to you."

The two gentlemen approached, and both addressed young Vanderlip familiarly; then the elder man, Colonel Hoyt, introduced the speaker to Miss Lillian Crandall. A few commonplaces about the ball were exchanged, and then Fontaine asked:

"Have you a vacant number on your card, Miss Crandall?"

The Speaker of the House

She replied, with her usual naive frankness:

"Oh, yes, quite a number of them; the next one, indeed."

And he reached for the dainty booklet dangling from her fan, and wrote his name against a waltz, the music for which began almost immediately.

"There is a charming girl in the governor's parlor, whom I wish you to know, Clarence my boy," said bustling little Colonel Hoyt.

With a low bow, the youth resigned Lillian to her new partner, and went off with his uncle. The dance ended; other partners claimed Lillian, and presently she again found herself with Clarence Vanderlip.

"Could he dance—your grown-up partner?" he asked.

"Gloriously!" she exclaimed. "I shall tell sister that for once in my life I have waltzed with a man. He is quite bald. How old is he, should you think?"

Vanderlip laughed merrily.

"You speak as if he might be sixty. And he isn't bald at all, only his top locks look a little thin. I believe he is not much past thirty; but

he has been prominent in state politics for several years, and has always been spoken of as a hopeless bachelor or widower, I don't know which."

"He dances well, for a man out of practice," said Lillian. "He told me this was his first ball in years. Now, Clarence, you may take me to sister for a little while. I think we will find her in the State library, with Mrs. Colby."

They reached the library door, and there Vanderlip became entangled in a snarl of pretty girls. Lillian spied her sister, Mrs. Hollis, and dropped into a deep leathern chair just behind her, without challenging her attention.

Sitting there for a few moments' rest, she overheard the story of Fontaine's early bereavement.

Fontaine himself discovered that night that the blood of youth was still in his veins. The early goers had all gone, when Miss Norgate said to him:

"The governor is holding a brief, secret session in his office. He asked me to send you there."

The speaker laughed and turned the other way.

"I've been dancing, and it has gone to my head. I'll not go into caucus to-night."

"But he really told me to send you."

"All the same I do not feel like going. Edith, aren't you crowding matters a little? I'm with the governor heartily in this pet scheme of his, as I believe I've told you before."

"But you should assure him of the fact. You should make him know that if he gains what he wishes, it will be largely through your influence."

"What's the use, so he gains his wish?"

"Bruce, you are dull. Now to-night, by a word or two, you could volunteer your championship in this matter, which he has so much at heart, and by so doing take a place in his regard that might be of endless use to you in future."

"I may be dull," he said dryly, "but I have understood you from the first. I have no desire to place a price, even of gratitude, upon what I am determined to do, to please myself, and because I think it fitting. Now, let us find little Eberly, if she is still here, and see whether she is provided with a proper escort."

Before long, the last carriage rolled away

from the Capitol grounds and the ball was over.

The new speaker found that the formation of his standing committees was no slight task. There was a goodly number of second and third termers with whom he was somewhat acquainted, this being his second term. There was, however, a considerable proportion of new men, of whose gifts and capabilities he knew nothing. He honestly wished to organize the assembly in the best possible working order. He also wished to reward with a congenial chairmanship apiece, several men, who had been instrumental in turning the battle for the speakership in his favor. And he desired, moreover, to show himself a magnanimous victor, by giving a choice of places to Maddox of Lambert, his most formidable opponent in the contest.

Strangely enough, Fontaine's nearest friend, the member of the house whom he liked best personally, belonged to the minority, and promised to be its leader. John Atwater could talk well, and not too much. He was a physician who had farmed out his practice for two winters that he might push in the legislature a

single measure. His heart was set upon the enactment of a law which would make it impossible for courts to compel physicians to testify as experts, on the footing of ordinary witnesses. He had been committed for contempt, suffered fines, and temporary imprisonment for defying the courts in this matter. He said:

"I am here now to fight for my bill and see it through, if eloquence, intimidation or corruption can get it passed."

Atwater was sure of the committee on state medicine. After that he did not care much where he served.

He was a thick-set man of medium height, with a fresh-colored face and side-whiskers. He gave his soft brown hair a middle parting and wore a pair of nose-glasses dangling from a cord in his button-hole. He and Fontaine had been classmates for two years in a fresh-water college. Both left at the same time and for the same reason. It was Atwater who had said:

"We have a fair stock of history and mathematics, and Greek enough to help us out on nomenclature. Now I am going to Rush, to take the full course and collaterals; and you can

go to the Old Harry, or a law-school, which last I'd advise."

Fontaine had thought of the same thing—that is, giving the classical diploma the go by; and he was prompt to act on his friend's suggestion.

They were in Chicago together for a year. Then Fontaine met and suddenly married the daughter of a prominent lawyer in his own capital and was taken into his father-in-law's business, as junior partner. Such an office as Mr. Lombard's was better than a dozen law-schools. No young man ever had fairer prospects. Bruce was talented and industrious, and Mr. Lombard regarded him admiringly, as a son-in-law of whom he would one day feel proud. Then followed the sudden, painful death of Fontaine's wife, and the young man broke with the family and left the city.

He settled in one of the large river towns and worked. He visited his parents at the old farm once a year. For the rest, his life was made up of work. When he was not in the courts, he was at his briefs or his books. When he next came to the capital to remain for a term of weeks, it was as a representative in the legisla-

ture. His plans were formed, and from the start he took an active part in the House. He was quick as light, and had many of the qualities of leadership. Parliamentary law was part of the furniture of his rather remarkable memory, and before the end of his first term he was more than once called upon to preside temporarily at the speaker's desk. At the beginning of his second term, he made a fight for the speakership and won it. It was a step toward congress or a good judgeship, he had not decided which.

Atwater had never married. He resided in an old city in the interior, which had once been a military post, and had since enjoyed a steady commercial growth. His practice was large, and his life fully and pleasantly occupied.

The two friends stood for a few moments in the cloak-room of the representatives' hall, on the Monday morning following the inaugural ceremonies. All of Saturday, and we grieve to say, part of Sunday, had been devoted by Fontaine to the business of arranging committees. He had availed himself of Atwater's counsel to a greater extent than the leaders of his own party were aware; and this brief conference in

the cloak-room was in reference to the same business. Just before the hour for opening struck, Atwater said:

"I have taken a great liberty, Fontaine, counting on your good-nature to excuse it. Yesterday I met Bishop Haliburton, and invited him to read prayers in the house this morning. I gave the invitation as coming from you. I thought very likely the subject of a chaplain had escaped your thought; and as this is our first regular working day, I was anxious that it should open with due form and rightly. Then, too, it will probably be our only opportunity to have the bishop's services."

Fontaine expressed his pleasure at the arrangement, and said:

"There is the bishop now."

The two men went forward to meet him, and Doctor Atwater introduced his friend the speaker. As the bishop removed his broad hat and overcoat, and gave them to a door-keeper, Atwater entered the hall where, most of the members were already in their places, and passing quickly to the table of the reading-clerk, he obtained the attention of the assembly which rose and stood,

quiet and reverent, while Fontaine, accompanied by the church dignitary, walked up the center aisle to the speaker's desk.

CHAPTER III

The —th assembly, like all previous assemblies, was largely composed of farmers. Most of them were men of solid property. Some were men of shrewd intelligence and sound judgment, and, by so much, fitted for the place they had been called to fill. Many were illiterate and capable only of voting. A few of the more slow-witted were unqualified for the intelligent performance of that function. They were all right, when the yeas and nays were called, if their initial letters stood low enough in the alphabet, so that they could hear how certain others of their party voted, from whom they had decided to take their cue; otherwise they were always at sea. Atwater had his double; so had Maddox and McNulty.

Mr. Breck, of Stillwell County was a farmer. He was, moreover, a well-informed and clear-headed member. On one of the first days of

the session, he approached Fontaine with a peculiar, quizzical look, and remarked:

"You haven't asked me yet, Mr. Speaker, upon what committee I'd like a place. Now, if it's just the same to you, put me on the judiciary. *There's* a hole that a pile of bills gets dropped into, and I'd like to have a chance to see where they go to."

"The committee on judiciary is usually made up of gentlemen in the legal profession," said Fontaine, with a smile.

"Well," said Breck, "I'm not a lawyer, nor the son of a lawyer, but I've been a justice of the peace for twenty years, and I've read a good deal of common law. I think I'd do for that committee."

"So do I," said the speaker.

He was not certain whether the farmer was in earnest or not, but he broke in upon precedent, and gave him a place on the judiciary committee.

From the start, Mr. Fontaine showed his courage to defy precedent, and act on his individual judgment. He had ambitious aims, but ambition was not all-powerful. With him the

work in hand was the greatest thing in the world, to be executed upon honor, and with tireless energy.

His peculiarly vigorous nature was evidenced in his physique. In figure he was slightly above medium height, well-knit and deep-chested, with a fine head carried well up, and a face whose aquiline firmness was softened by the light in his hazel eyes and the contours of his cleft chin and finely modeled mouth. The latter feature suffered the disfigurement of a heavy mustache, a shade lighter than his brown hair. His movements were quick and decided. The man of forceful action spoke through step and gesture.

From the moment of his first lifting the gavel, at the speaker's desk, his command of the house was absolute. His voice rang out, in clear, agreeable tones, with an enunciation peculiarly distinct and free from hesitation. He mastered the "plot" of the assembly—that is, the names, faces and seats of the members, as corresponding with the counties and districts which they represented—without difficulty or delay, and his rulings from first to last were unimpeachable.

"We have a speaker to be proud of," said an

elderly business man, who represented a mining county, to the lieutenant governor, as the two met at the door of the elevator.

"That's more than the upper house can say," chuckled the toothless old president of the senate, who had aimed at the governorship and missed, and treated his present position as a sort of joke.

Late on Friday afternoon of the session's first week, a page handed Mr. Fontaine a letter. The superscription was in a bold hand, but Bruce knew it to be that of a woman. He laid the letter down till after the house adjourned, then opened the large, rough envelope before he left his place.

"If you would like to bid me good-bye, come this evening, about eight. I should like to see you again. Tuesday was the last time; but you have been tremendously rushed with affairs, and I excuse you. I go home to-night. Father is ill and I am needed.

"E. N."

He thought hurriedly over his engagements. They were enough to fill every hour that evening, but something must be set aside for this.

Passing down the aisle, he stopped his friend McNulty at the door and said:

"That matter of yours, Mack—it was to have been settled to-night. I intended to have a talk with Wainwright (the chief door-keeper) about putting your man on the force, but I cannot meet him as I planned. Something else has come up. But go yourself, and say for me—anything you please, that will help your cause."

"Anything that is the truth," said McNulty. "Do you know, Bruce, I'd not like to mix your name up with any of the stock lies pertaining to this business. For myself, I don't mind."

"Much obliged," laughed Fontaine, and the other man continued:

"This door-keeping humbug is getting to be an insufferable nuisance. Now, if Wainwright even consents to take on little Totten, what is there for him to do? There's a man on each side of every door in the edifice now."

"And no more spaces where doors could be put in," said Fontaine. McNulty pointed to the brass rail that enclosed the floor proper of the hall, from the space around, and said:

"I've an idea. There might be a section cut

out of the rail at this end of that aisle, and a sliding gate made, of a yard of gas-pipe. Totten could tend that, and earn his five dollars a day. But it's all right, Bruce, about your seeing Wainwright, or rather not seeing him. And it's all right, whatever happens. I'll see you to-night, about twelve, at the Helicon."

He was of Irish blood, well built and handsome, with quick motions and expressive blue eyes, which were either dancing with mirth or emitting sparks of satiric fire. As he talked with Fontaine, the latter observed a peculiar excitement about the man, which he well understood. He called after him, as he turned away.

"I say, Mack, what are you going to do to-night? Remember old Croom's last words."

"Faith, I've smiled to myself over 'em a dozen times to-day; and I'll not forget."

He laughed, as he shook himself into his overcoat and turned up its collar of rich fur, but the laugh was not a heartsome one.

If Mr. Fontaine was not a society man, he had the tastes, in matters of toilet, that are supposed to characterize the more sensible and conservative of that class. He never adopted

the fads of the "chappies," but the regulations as to day and evening dress which good form approves, were never too great a tax upon his time and patience. The refreshment of a bath, after his day's work, was as necessary to him as his dinner, and a systematic though not fussy care of his person, was with him part of the program of existence.

While the freshness of his attire on that Friday evening seemed to him merely proper and comfortable, it struck Edith Norgate as something more. So many men had called upon her, during the past week, bearing with them the odors, and even the dust of offices and hotel reading-rooms, that his appearance pointed a most agreeable contrast.

Edith's father, Mr. Alexander Norgate, was the proprietor and nominal editor of one of the strongest political newspapers in the State. But it had come to be an open secret that much of the brilliant writing that made the *Hillhurst Times* to be quoted throughout the west, was the work of his daughter Edith. She and Bruce Fontaine were old time friends. Their families had been country neighbors, and the two were

playmates and schoolmates in childhood, being, within a month or two, the same age.

They had always seen a good deal of each other, except during the years when Bruce was away at school, and afterwards while he was in Judge Lombard's office.

After Fontaine lost his wife and left the capital, he took up his residence in the river town of Colton. His law-practice took him often into the adjoining counties, and in one of their flourishing cities, also on the river, Edith Norgate edited the Hillhurst *Times*. Her acquaintance with current politics was very complete, both as to its theory, which is one thing, and its practice, which is very often another. Fontaine did not pretend ignorance of the fact that he owed his nomination as joint representative for the two counties of Kirby and Hillhurst, in large measure, to the Hillhurst *Times*. And to the *Times* he was also indebted for the very handsome majority with which he carried the election. He could not forget those temperate, calmly persuasive and irresistibly convincing leaders, which made it impossible for the reading men of the district to give their votes for

assemblyman to any other than Bruce Fontaine. After the election, when he tried to thank Edith for what she had done for him, she answered curtly:

"The work was its own reward. I like to do good things in journalism, and see them succeed. And after all, I think the result would have been the same if the *Times* had kept silent."

And he responded:

"It pleases me to believe you, for it lightens a sense of service received, which I do not know how to repay."

"Oh, you shall repay me, all right enough," she said, laughingly, "first by starting in for the speakership and getting it; then by doing for me several other things which your position will enable you to do."

She went to the capital a week before the opening of the session, and from her quiet corner in a friend's house, watched the mustering of the clans, and the contest for the chieftainship. The stamping, smoking, vociferating hordes that thronged the hotels, were reached more than once by her subtle influence, though they knew it not. Her acquaintance with

the governor elect, whose married daughter was her intimate friend, was one of the agencies she employed to benefit Fontaine.

When Mr. Fontaine called upon her that night, he found Edith dressed, not for a journey, but as for a reception. She was a fair young woman, of medium height, with a figure whose contours were symmetrically and delicately rounded, without a superfluous ounce of nature's padding. She had a complexion like a healthy blond girl of fifteen, blue eyes with dark brows and lashes, and an abundance of light hair, worn high on her shapely head. She dressed in black a great deal, as being always elegant, and to her very becoming.

"I am glad you are gotten up so nicely," she said to Bruce, as she welcomed him, "for I am going to take you with me to the *Silver Salver*."

"I thought you were going home," he said, "but this does not look much like it," sweeping his hand toward her gown of lace over satin.

"O, I am surely going, between now and daylight. But this club-meeting had slipped my mind, till an hour ago, when I received a note from the president, begging me to attend. I have

been a non-resident member for two years, and in that time have attended two meetings."

She noticed a slightly rueful expression on Fontaine's face, and continued:

"Don't look bored. You'll enjoy it. The club is entirely unconventional, even Bohemian in its character. The membership consists of people who have done something with brush or pen or fiddle-bow—artists, writers and musicians."

"But I am neither."

"So you could not be a member; but you can attend through my invitation, and I guess you will. It isn't in you to refuse me anything to-night," and she flashed him a brilliant smile.

"You are right, Edith," he responded. "I feel like swearing fealty to you on my bended knees. Ask of me what you will, and it shall be done."

"Then button these stupid gloves. It is the one thing for which I have no patience."

He took each shapely wrist in his hand, and buttoned the gloves, deftly, yet deliberately.

"Thank you," she said, when he had finished. "And now, as this seems to be a good time to prefer requests, I wish you to put matters in line, in the House, to have Mrs. Eberly ap-

pointed state librarian. She is capable and worthy and it will please the governor."

"You seem at all times anxious to please the governor," Fontaine remarked. She answered dryly:

"It is well to have people pleased. Mrs. Eberly is a widow, with two young children. She understands library work, and she is the daughter of Governor Townley's old friend and law-partner."

"To please you and the governor, yes," said Fontaine; "but to put a woman in a State office, no is my feeling."

"Bruce, I am ashamed of you!"

"O, well, if you are I am sorry," he continued. "I am sorry for Mrs. Eberly, that she should need and want an office. She shall have it, if I can help her to it, but just the same I wish she did not want it. I wish no woman with young children had to take upon themselves duties so alien to domesticity."

It came from him as a sort of outburst. Edith was silent, with a pained look on her face.

"We do not always see or feel alike," he went on, "much as we have in common. Now there

is a certain incongruity about our relations to each other, which you seem utterly unconscious of, but which I never forget. We are good comrades, like two young men; yet you are not a young man."

"I'm precious glad of it!" she broke out petulantly. "They are a lot of top-lofty prigs, or boorish, conceited cads!"

He laughed gleefully.

"There was nothing young-mannish about that, but quite the reverse, even to the suspicion of a hysterical tear. Edith, you are a jolly good fellow, but I like you less as an editor than as a girl."

"Nice gratitude, that. "

"O, I am grateful enough, painfully so, indeed. You shall have your little librarian, and the dear governor shall have the pristine glory of his office restored to him, if I can help to effect it. But you forget that I am not the legislature."

"You are," she rejoined, "an important member of it, as you very well know; and if there is anything I hate worse than another in a man, it is an affectation of self-disparagement."

They were in the carriage she had ordered, to take them to the rooms of the Silver Salver Club. She was still half offended, and when she spoke there was a tremor in her voice. She sat withdrawn from him, in the scented warmth of her rich furs. He felt a perverse desire to hurt her again, to make her cry indeed, and then take her in his arms. He wondered at his own mad impulses.

CHAPTER IV

The club-room was in a vast, hip-roofed wooden structure, which looked like an old Pennsylvania mill. Its exterior had been preserved unchanged, just as it had stood since forty years before, when it was the church in which a young man began his ministerial work, who afterwards became one of America's greatest preachers. Inside, it had been divided into stories and rooms; but the light still entered through the old fashioned, small-paned windows.

When Fontaine and Miss Norgate arrived, the room was already fairly well filled with people sitting or standing about in groups. On the walls were some excellent paintings. In one corner stood a piano; in another a high cupboard of red-stained cherry wood, which looked as though it might have come from some farmhouse kitchen, in the neighborhood of the mill after which the church had been modeled. This piece of furniture the club people called the

buffet. Some pretty china showed through the glass doors of its upper half. Below, the shelves were deeper, and the doors of solid wood.

A little crowd gathered around Edith. Fontaine was introduced and welcomed cordially.

Looking across toward the door, he saw Atwater enter, and with him the tall brunette to whom Colonel Hoyt had presented him on the night of the inaugural ball. Edith saw the couple at the same moment and said:

"There is your friend, Doctor Atwater. He is a non-resident member, like myself."

"A member is he," queried Fontaine; "by what right?"

"He writes for the magazines."

"The medical ones, yes."

"No, the great monthlies," said Edith. "Articles in the popular science line. He and Lillian Crandall's father are chums. They have a microscope, and between them have analyzed pretty much all the green scum of the marshes around Ellersport. From the green scum was evolved the magazine papers."

A minute or two later Fontaine felt a hand on his shoulder, and turned to face Atwater and

his lovely companion. Edith adroitly managed an exchange of partners, and Fontaine found himself left to entertain a strange girl, about whom he knew nothing, save that she was a graceful dancer, and had a face like a tropical flower. The necessity of immediate conversation was averted, by some one striking a rich chord on the piano, when the chatting, laughing assemblage at once became hushed.

On a side table stood a silver salver, on which were piled as many sealed envelopes as there were club nights in a year. Each envelope contained the title of a literary or artistic topic, and a second card bearing the names of three members, one of whom would be called upon to make a five minutes impromptu speech upon the theme, after which the club would engage in free discussion. Such was the regular line of procedure. Edith had said to Fontaine:

“There is always good music, good talk, and afterwards coffee and a crust.”

The music that night was indeed excellent, and when it ended the president of the society picked up an envelope from the tray at a venture, and after opening it, announced that Doc-

tor Atwater of Ellersport would address the club, upon "Sectionalism in Fiction."

There was perhaps no readier man there than Atwater; yet he felt the shock of embarrassment which any other member would have felt under like circumstances. He rose, however, without a moment's hesitation, and had no difficulty in filling the time. The club took up the theme with avidity, and kept the ball rolling, with brief, telling remarks, full of wit and individuality. George Cable and Miss Murfree received the most attention. Miss Wilkins came in for a share, and a thick-set man, with a short upper lip and a black mustache, rose and said he was hourly expecting to see Miss Wilkins attacked by some champion of rural New England, who would prove her guilty of libeling a harmless and long-suffering portion of the community. Cable, he said, had been obliged to stay away from New Orleans, since the publication of his studies of creole life, and a man name Craddock had tried to get a land-title perfected in a Tennessee court, and the judge "set upon" him, because, he said, he believed "he was the very same feller who writ agin the mountings."

Some one brought up Eggleston, and by the time the "Hoosier Schoolmaster" and the "Circuit Rider" were passed in review, there was a fragrance of hot coffee stealing through the long room. A lady in an empire gown of gay brocade, with a girdle of hammered silver, and another in a tailor-made suit of dark broadcloth, went back and forth from the buffet to a table behind a tall screen. While these mysterious operations were in progress, the talk drifted far and wide; laughter and jests prevailed.

A little group still dangled by a long cord, to the subject of the night. Eggleston's "Faith Doctor" led to a rambling talk upon occult cures. One gentleman ventured the remark, that the day would come when a certain high class of functional forces belonging to humanity, whose operations now seem quite lawless and erratic, would be clearly understood.

"I am with you there," said Atwater, "but the day of which you speak is still far distant."

Fontaine moved impatiently, and the glance he gave Atwater had a touch of scorn.

Lillian Crandall observed it; so did Edith Norgate. The latter said smilingly:

"It would be interesting to know what a hardened materialist, like Mr. Fontaine, would have to say about the wonders performed by some of our latter-day layers on of hands."

"I disclaim the title you have given me," he said quietly, "and I also disclaim all interest in your so-called wonders. I think they are, for the most part, lying wonders. Certain psychological laws may play a part in certain instances, mercenary craft and unblushing humbuggery play a much larger part. Busy people have no time to sift a matter so involved, and whose proven value is so slight."

Edith covertly watched Miss Crandall while he spoke; and all listened attentively as she said, in a clear, sweet voice:

"I agree with Mr. Fontaine. All attempts to reach the core of reality in such matters as the effect of mind upon mind, or mind upon body, must prove futile. What has been named Christian Science is no science at all, and I agree with the honorable speaker, too, as to the duplicity practiced by many of its votaries."

"From blue glass to the Keeley cure, all is vanity and vexation of spirit," drawled the black

mustache—a striking looking man, whose face always recalled that of his father, a distinguished war-governor.

“By the way,” he continued, “the Dwight necromancer has straightened up several fellows of my acquaintance, most remarkably. Doctor Atwater, you are in a position to know; which is it, the man or the medicine?”

“Both,” said Atwater. “I am acquainted with Dr. Keeley, personally. Like all physicians, he has a large knowledge of the confiding gullibility of the human family. In my opinion, he would not scruple to deal in humbug, pure and simple, if it served his purpose and injured no one. But his treatment does not just come under that category. He rouses men’s will-power, and gives to it the added impulse of his own remarkable personality. I could do just what Keeley does, if I were like him; but I am not. I could never secure such trust and obedience. If men want alcohol he gives it to them charged with something which causes loathing. He administers a medicine for racked nerves and calls it chloride of gold; but that’s a detail. Gold is a word to conjure with”

The coffee was served, and the crust, which proved to be angels' food with pink sherbet, joyously eaten. At one o'clock Fontaine put Edith aboard a south-bound train and bade her adieu.

"Come up again soon," he said. "You'll have to keep watch of me I can not remember half the orders you have given me"

Her blue eyes shone, as she smiled through her veil and said:

"I'll keep watch of you; never fear."

Fontaine returned to his hotel, and late as it was, he found McNulty in the smoking-room. He was standing under the gas, his hat on the back of his head, talking rapidly to a group of men about him, who were laughing at his remarks.

"Ah, here comes the speaker," he said, turning to Fontaine "Rather late for you, my friend. You should follow my example—that is, the example I am going to set; for in just a quarter of an hour, more or less, I shall be in bed. Say, Fontaine, was it you or some other fellow who reminded me to-day of old Fred Croom? You see, boys, when Croom was running for con-



"I'll keep watch of you; never fear."

gress, I used to go about with him a good bit; and he never bade me good-night or good-bye without saying:

“‘Take care of yourself, Mack—*take care of yourself.*’ And when he started for Washington, a week or so ago, he said it again, with tears in his eyes. The dear soul seemed always afraid somebody or something was going to get away with me. I used to introduce him to his audiences in the west counties, where there are a lot of German’s, as ‘Unser Fritz;’ and then I’d make them a little German speech. It always tickles a crowd to hear an Irishman talk Dutch. Croom had a grand bass voice, and when the talks were over we’d give them a verse or two of ‘Die Wacht am Rhine.’ By the way, boys, you’ve all heard of Bingen on the Rhine?”

One after another of the group said or sung: “Fair Bingen—sweet Bingen—calm Bingen on the Rhine.”

“Well, the oddest thing happened to-day. I found a man who was born and brought up at Bingen—the very old spot! He keeps store in a basement, and he sells some of the finest Rhine wine on earth. It’s just around here on Ches-

roun Street. Come on and see if I'm lying. If I am, I'll pay for a tierce of any other kind you may order."

He had a hand on one man's lapel and reached for Fontaine's arm, but the speaker drew back.

"Hold on, Mack. How about that good example? Stop and go to bed."

But McNulty was gone, and Bruce knew the dawn would find him in the wine-shop.

CHAPTER V

When he awoke the next morning, and many times during the day, Fontaine's mind recurred to something Edith had said, on the way from the club-room to the depot. It was to the effect that Lillian Crandall was some sort of nondescript practitioner, like Eggleston's faith doctor. She said:

"I tried to get you to make some incisive, sweeping remark, that would shock the nonsense out of her, but for once you were rather tame." And he responded:

"Thanks. Her eyes are like brown agates. You have surely been misinformed. She does not look like one of that sort. She is neither visionary nor designing. Then, too, she is a society girl; and they never allow themselves to be diverted, by ever so little, from the beaten path."

Edith laughed as she said:

"That prejudice of yours against society girls

has become chronic. I don't know that I care to have it cured." A moment later she continued, gravely:

"I have had a speaking acquaintance with Miss Crandall for a year or two, and have heard more or less about her whenever I have come up here. Her sister is the wife of Tom Hollis, the publisher; she stays with them when she is in the city. I can not tell you just what I have heard, but it amounts to this, that she practices mind-cure. There is some foundation for the rumor, I feel sure; but the Holliss are utterly silent on the subject, as is Lillian herself."

Doctor Atwater kept a horse and sleigh in town, and on Sunday afternoon, he and Fontaine took a long, brisk drive. Bruce repeated what Edith had said about Miss Crandall and the mind-cure.

"Miss Norgate was not altogether wide of the mark," said Atwater; "though I feel sure the impression she gave you was an erroneous one. The Crandalls are one of the old families of our city; came in with the English after the French, as they say. I have known Lillian since she was a child. Her mother died many years ago,

and her father is something of a recluse. Lillian herself has a peculiar organization. She is something of a mind-reader. She always knows when her father particularly wishes for her, during her absences from home; and she has more than once surprised me, by speaking out my thought, when it had no relevancy to anything which had been said before. The subject was usually of no moment. She has told me, that while she has many times felt sure she knew what was passing in the mind of another, she believed, in no case were the thoughts such as might not have been spoken aloud. Usually they were so spoken, very soon. She never saw a secret, and was thankful for the fact.

“Three years ago she went with the Gardiners of Ellersport, to California. They were spending some weeks at Los Gatos, and I, happening to be out there, joined them for a time. There was, boarding at the Mountain Springs Hotel, a lady with an epileptic son—a lad of about fourteen. One morning a number of us started out for a stroll through the woods, and this is what happened. The boy, whose seizures could never be anticipated, was one of the party. He

was walking in front of Lillian, when he suddenly grew rigid and was about to fall. She sprang forward, caught him by the shoulders, and spoke his name. The fit was arrested. He turned to his mother and said:

“‘It has gone!’

“I was not particularly surprised that she could do this once, but it did puzzle me when I saw her do it many times. The poor lad remained near her as much as he could, and his attacks became less and less frequent. He, with his mother accompanied the Gardiner party to Los Angeles and thence by sea to Portland; and before our people left the Pacific coast, Ralph Oliver appeared to be perfectly well.

“Lillian does not understand it at all. She says she was conscious only, of wishing insistently, that Ralph might not have a fit, and the wish was accompanied with a sense of power to command his nervous system not to yield.

“After we were all back in Ellersport, I had more than one talk with her about the matter. She was utterly without any theory concerning it, and it was only after long persuasion that I induced her to try her power upon other subjects, which she finally consented to do.”

"And with what result?" queried Fontaine, deeply interested.

"The patients—for they were patients of mine—were in all three cases women suffering from nervous complaints. Lillian controlled their symptoms by holding their hands. There seemed to be nothing very involved about the matter. Where organic disease existed, she could do nothing; but where the suffering was the result of disordered nerves, she could give relief."

"Was the matter made public in Ellersport?" asked Fontaine.

"No," replied his friend, "but it might better have been. The strangest stories went abroad. Lillian was less annoyed by them, than I feared she would be."

"You have known the Crandalls very intimately," Fontaine remarked. To this the doctor responded:

"I was always a sort of favorite with the old gentleman, and latterly I have been his physician. He is something of a scientist, and full of eccentric whims and opinions. You would call him a 'crank.' He is rich by inherited prop-

erty, and is not nearly so well-balanced as though he had been forced to adopt some definite pursuit."

"Mr. Crandall has been twice married, I am told."

"Yes, Mrs. Tom Hollis, the daughter of the first wife, is twenty years older than her half sister, Lillian. Since the death of Lillian's mother Mr. Crandall has lived very retired, with an elderly female relative for a housekeeper. Now and then he enjoys having a friend visit him, to listen to his vaporings. He has a comprehensive scheme to relieve the friction everywhere; to equalize the benefits and soften the ills of the world. Yet he is not a socialist, nor in the accepted sense, a labor reformer. He says society and the political world are not, as yet, solid enough to bear the leverage of his idea. That is the way he phrases it. He is fully persuaded, that so far as the financial condition of the country is concerned, the devil and Tom Sawyer are just over the hill. Yet, odd as he seems at times, he is in many respects most admirable. He represents a luxury our country has not felt able to indulge in, to any great ex-

tent—the intellectual man of leisure. He is delightfully genial to his friends and favorites, and his love for his youngest daughter is very unselfish and tender.”

“You sometimes call upon Miss Crandall, at her sister’s, do you not?” asked Fontaine.

“O, yes,” said Atwater, “and sometime I shall be most happy to take you with me, as an old friend.”

“The young lady invited me to call, at the end of our chat last Friday night.”

Atwater looked slightly surprised.

“I believe I introduced you,” he remarked.

“We had met before,” said Fontaine, “at the inaugural ball. I danced with her once.”

Atwater abruptly changed the subject, and after a brief talk about matters pertaining to the House, they finished their drive almost in silence.

CHAPTER VI

The assembly weeks that followed were crowded with business, of the usual ineffective character. The Senate got to work promptly, and soon had a heavy batch of bills sent down to the House. They got a first reading there, and then awaited their turn. In the House, the new members kept the pages running to the speaker's desk, with bills and resolutions. The committees worked night after night over the stupendous problem of "how not to do it." And when their reports began to come in, the recommendation of indefinite postponement occurred with monotonous frequency.

Mr. Breck of Stillwell came along to where Calkins of Putnam stood, with his thumbs in his vest-pockets, looking very loose-jointed, and out of a job, and generally uncomfortable. Breck gave him a familiar slap on the shoulder as he remarked:

"Well, old man, how do you like it, as far as you've gone?"

Calkins was a long, lean farmer, with sandy hair and pale-blue eyes. His blond face showed a frosty pink through its coat of last summer's tan. He changed his balance to the other foot, took a cake of navy from his pocket, and with a broad-bladed jackknife proceeded to carve a true cube which he deposited in his left cheek.

"How do I like it?" he repeated. "Not so thunderin' well as I might. I'd ruther be splittin' stave-bolts or hullin' clover-seed, and it's them like things I ort to be doin' just now. To think o' my settin' all winter in a stuffed chair, afore a curly-maple desk, with a pile o' Acts on top of it, and a big waste-paper basket in under it! About the only blame bit o' this gorjus State House furniture I got any use fer, is ther nickel-plated spittoons, and I aint the only man in that fix."

Breck laughed, a little ruefully, as he said:

"It does seem to take us country members a good while to get the run of things. Seems like pretty much all the blowing was being done by the lawyers, and that preacher—they say

he's a broken-down minister, but his wind's good yet—and that German chemist, with his food 'dulterations, and the fellows that have come here to represent the different societies—the Patrons of Industry and the Plumbers' Association, and the Boiler-makers' Guild. Have you done any committee work yet?"

"O, yes, I've *set* on a committee. I'd like to *tramp* on it. I don't know much, but I know enough to keep my mouth shut. The whole thing is a fakir's juggle, and the most ridiculous thing about it is, the lot of us that come here every day to look on, and make believe we're in it. There's that dum-blistered readin' clerk, now—I'd like to hit him with a stuffed club! Startin' off like a blind pacer over the quarter-stretch, with 'a nact to 'mend a nact,' an' not another word can you understand, till he fetches up winded, with, 'perceed to declare an emergency.' You know, Breck, I was elected as a dark hawse candidate."

He gave a roll to his quid, and an indescribably ludicrous grimace.

"Yaas, a dark hawse I was. Well, I think I'll go home and re-register as a sorrel donkey."

They were standing beside the cigar-stand, in the lower court of the capitol. A little group had gathered around, to enjoy the farmer's original expressions. It was Mr. McNulty who said:

"The gentleman from Putnam is all there, when he says, or implies, that a few men control the House! It is always the case except upon political questions, when there is a distinctly party vote. A few men keep the ball rolling, and there is no reason, Calkins, why a member with your good horse sense, and your limber tongue, should not be of that number."

Calkins laughed derisively.

"Aw, come off! You're an Irishman! I've no education and I'm not a lawyer. And mind you," he continued, "I've got through kickin' about the legislature havin' too many lawyers in it. I'd like to know when any business would ever be got along with, in this body, ef it wasn't fer the lawyers."

"You're about right, there," said Breck, with an air of profound knowledge. "The committee on judiciary, now, is made up of lawyers, with the exception of myself, and the amount of

labor we have to perform —well, Mr. McNulty here knows. He's on that committee too. The bills that are referred to us are, for the most part, simply"—he hesitated for a word and Calkins supplied "rot."

"Look here, Calkins," said McNulty, "there's a matter coming up after awhile, that I wish you'd keep your weather eye open for. I'll tell you when it is to come before the House, and prime you a bit. And if that patent feed-chopper of a reading-clerk makes a mess of it, I'll get the bill down and go over it with you, and then I want you to make a speech, in your own picturesque style."

"On the floor of the House?"

"Certainly."

"Not if the court knows herself, and she thinks she does."

With this classic quotation Calkins turned away. He walked deliberately past the elevator, climbed the stairs and went to his seat.

McNulty and the other members still lingered in the lower court, smoking and talking.

Two measures of importance were being discussed by this assembly. One was the passage

of a bill amending the law relating to the fees and salaries of State and county officers. The other was the restoration of the appointing power to the governor.

It is a fact to be deplored, that four fifths of all our legislation, both national and state, is of a purely political character. The people elect representatives to spend weeks and months pulling the same old wires, and continuing in the halls of legislation the contest for party supremacy, which is the salient function of all conventions and primaries.

The assembly over which Bruce Fontaine presided was no exception to the general rule. Two years before, the chief work of the legislature, a very one-sided body, had been to reapportion or "gerrymander" the State, thus giving the party in power an apparently unlimited period of ascendancy. At that time the governor was on the minority side, and the legislature did the very reprehensible thing, of taking from the chief executive certain prerogatives which in the nature of things should belong to him, and making them its own by legal enactment. They left the governor sitting in his high place, a mere

lay figure, crippled in every function of his office. There were upright men of the majority, who fought the measure, as an act of party despotism. Still it carried; and now that a man of their own side had been elected to the first place in the offices of the State, the propriety of restoring to him the appointing power was seriously discussed in both legislative houses.

Mr. Fontaine had, in the previous assembly, opposed the wresting of this power. He was a strong partisan, but he was also an upright man, and this act he considered a piece of party assumption, the gain of which would not be commensurate with the blame it would call forth from the opposition, and the State at large. During the long periods lying between the sessions of the legislature, the benevolent and penal institutions of the State are the Governor's immediate charge, and no let should be placed upon his ability to make any changes in their supervisory boards which in his judgment should seem necessary.

Governor Townley was extremely anxious for this assembly to undo the bad work of the preceding one, and the best men in both houses, and of both parties, were with him.

Still when the measure came up for consideration, there was opposition to it, and Fontaine kept the bill back, while caucus after caucus was held, and much individual work was done in its behalf. It was passed at last, giving back to the executive what should never have been taken away from him.

After the House adjourned, on the day of the vote, Governor Townley sent for the speaker. Bruce started obediently, in answer to the summons. In the corridor he ran against McNulty, and greeted him with:

"The very boy I wanted to see! I am on my way to the throne-room; you must come along and take your share."

"My share of what?" asked the mercurial city member.

"Of thanks, compliments, etc. The governor is something of a gusher, and is quite carried away by the result of the vote. No man did more to bring it about than yourself, and he shall know it."

"He is tickled over the way it was done," said McNulty. "The bill would have passed the House two weeks ago, the minority voting for

it solidly. But Townley wanted the thing done by his own party, as at last it was, though by a tight squeeze. There's a number of fellows opposed to the old man, on general principles. I ought to be, for I'm a sort of a cuss, you know, and he's all straight wood. I know two men who offered their support to the governor, with a price attached. They got unexpectedly sat upon, and they have opposed him bitterly ever since."

They had reached the outer office, and Mr. Knox, the private secretary, was showing them into the governor's sanctum. He met them with his fine, manly face all smiles, and while shaking hands with the speaker, he threw an embracing arm over McNulty's shoulders, and said:

"I know what this good fellow has been doing, the past ten days. Knox gave me the hint which you gave him, and I acted upon it."

McNulty laughed, as he remarked:

"Men are egotistical goats anyhow, most of 'em. I knew three or four members that could be worked through their vanity; so says I, the governor must send for them, one at a time, for a private and confidential talk. They each

walked out of this office your sworn knight and soldier. Tim Galaher, of Midmost, comes to me and says in a hoarse, Irish whisper:

“‘He’s a foine man, is the guvner, a mighty foine man, and as pleasant shpoken as ye plaze. Wud ye believe it, Mack, me boy, he sint for me to his own room, and we had a saycret conference, which I’ll not be talkin’ about to any man; but from this on the guvner’s intherests are me own.’”

The three men laughed, and Fontaine said:

“Well, governor, I was sent for too, and I came gladly, to shake your hand in congratulation; and now, if there is nothing further, we will give way to others.” They bowed themselves out, and retired through the ante-room, which was fast filling with callers.

Through all the wrangle over House Bill No. 37, Edith Norgate never lost sight of Fontaine. One afternoon he called the chairman of the ways and means committee to his desk, and resigning to him temporarily the gavel, went down to the floor, and made a brief, telling speech in favor of the bill. The next day he received a flattering letter from Edith.

After the passage of the bill by the House—which practically made it a law, for the Senate's concurrence was assured—he telegraphed the result to Edith, and received in reply:

“Good—glorious! Will be up next week to shake hands.”

CHAPTER VII

Mr. Fontaine was thinking with pleasure of the telegram, and his face showed it, as he and McNulty crossed the square together, to Capitol Street. Two fine, manly figures they were, striding along through the frosty air, with even, well-measured steps.

A summer evening in the country is a tranquilizing pleasure, a winter evening in the city an exhilarating delight. The blazing electric globes, the rolling vehicles, the animated throngs of the pavements, anticipation of table cheer and hearth cheer and hours of social refreshment, all combine to make the city pedestrian at nightfall a buoyant and happy being.

At least such a being was Bruce Fontaine on that Friday night. Other evenings were given, in part at least, to the business of the legislature. Friday evening he gave to himself. There was usually a short forenoon session on Saturday, and then adjournment till Monday. The

winter seemed to mark an era for the speaker. Within a month, some subtle change had come upon him. There was an added grace of bearing, a look of enlarged interest in life. For several years he had turned his back on society, and lived apart from women, except those of his own kin. And there was Edith Norgate—he had never turned his back on her.

She had always been his faithful friend and ally, his chum and good comrade. When he married Louise Lombard, Edith dropped the correspondence which they had always kept up during any separation, since childhood. After Mrs. Fontaine's death she resumed it herself, and it had continued in a desultory fashion. The phrase which often preceded her signature was, "Yours to command;" and he frequently did command her. The *Hillhurst Times* had championed every local cause in which he was interested, and castigated every man or measure which, in his opinion, was deserving of punishment. He had made money as a lawyer, and when on one occasion he inquired of Edith whether the paper was in good financial condition, she informed him coolly that its financial

condition was no concern of his, and if he had any cash to invest, she would advise him to buy mortgage notes.

It were idle to say that Mr. Fontaine had never thought of Edith as a wife. Indeed, he had thought of her that way a great many times. More than once he had said to himself:

“If I ever intended to marry, she would suit.”

She was his own age, about thirty-three; but she seemed to him more beautiful and fascinating each time he saw her.

As a child, she was never ill and was tirelessly active. She could play hounds and hares with Bruce and her two brothers, and liked to be the hare. As a very young girl, she was thin and angular and freckled. The boys gave her dreadful nicknames, such as “Scraps” and “Spotty.” Bruce recalled them sometimes, with an inward laugh, as he dwelt upon her exquisitely modeled figure, and delicate, healthful coloring. At twenty-five she was a very attractive young lady. At thirty she was a glowing beauty, and she would be a handsome woman at sixty. But the man knew that if ever he proposed to Edith, it would be for the reason that he be-

lieved she would always be a spur to his ambition and an ornament to his career, and because she suited him physically as well as another.

He had notions of what love meant; relative somewhat to that touching episode of his youth, his brief married life; modified largely by his maturer thought. He did not imagine he was in love with Edith Norgate, and as yet he was not quite ready to declare that love did not matter. Lately he had begun to think he was nearing a solution of the question whether he should offer himself to Edith. Perhaps, after all, he could love. Some change was working upon him. His life seemed to have acquired a fullness and richness unknown to it before. The earth was firmer to walk upon, the sky fuller of space and light, the air better to breathe. He worked constantly and ably, but without weariness, and the time of ennui and regrets seemed forever past.

He was crossing Chesroun Street that Friday evening, with McNulty, when a carriage drawn by a pair of glossy black horses, and driven by a glossy black negro, moved past them, at a

stately trot. It was occupied by a lady. Through the clear glass of the door, her face beamed out; literally beamed when her eyes fell upon Fontaine. She waved her hand, with her handkerchief in it, inside the glass. What was there to make his heart suddenly leap, and then labor at its beating? Only a smile, on a sweet girl face, and a pretty gesture. But such a smile!

"That was Tom Hollis's turnout, and that was his sister-in-law inside the coach," said McNulty. "He is a distinguished man, upon whom Miss Lillian Crandall bestows so much of her lofty attention. O no, she didn't include me. I know Tom as well as the next, and I used to know her, but have dropped away. She gave me a bit of a lecture once, which she should not have done. But my brother Mark, now, thinks there is nobody like her. She spends all her winters here, and this precious old town isn't so big but what all the nicest people may know each other. But that doesn't include me, at this writing."

They entered the Helicon House together. In the office they met young Mark McNulty, who was waiting to see his brother. He was a

tall, fresh-colored young man, some five years younger than the representative. Mark was in the employ of a large banking firm, and his face showed that he deserved the high place in his employer's esteem, which he enjoyed.

"Sure, an here is the bye himself," said McNulty, dropping into a strong brogue; "and a broth of a bye it is! Mark, me lad, let me have the playsure of introducin' you to Mr. Fontaine, the honorable Speaker of the House."

Bruce shook the youth's hand heartily, and after a few kindly sentences, left the brothers together and went up to his room.

He took Edith's last letter and her recent telegram from his pocket, and laid them in a drawer beside her picture. Just before leaving town the last time, she had a new photograph made; a Paris panel, one of Grierson's best. Bruce got one, of course. He took it up that evening, and examined the handsome, piquant face long and earnestly. When he laid it down, he knew he would never ask himself again whether or not he loved her.

He had met Lillian Crandall some half dozen times within the month—at the ball, at the club,

at a reception given by the wife of Judge Bainbridge, the senior on the supreme bench, and the other times at her home, where he had called, once with Atwater, afterwards alone. Whenever he had been thrown in her society, he had been filled with a strange happiness, each time stronger and more pervading than the last. She had a way of regarding him earnestly, with those wonderful, deep eyes. They were always ready to gleam and sparkle with mirth; but when they first turned to him, it was with a look of angelic sympathy.

If Lillian had not overheard that low-spoken talk between Mrs. Colby and her sister, that night in the State library, she would never have looked at him in just that way. She imagined him still overshadowed, in a sense, by the sorrow of that early bereavement, when in fact it was not the case. The story told with Mrs. Colby's graphic touches, was always fresh in her mind whenever she first saw him, though she ceased to remember it when they had been together for a few minutes.

Emerson says, "The only thing grief has taught me, is to know how shallow it is." Like

Emerson, Fontaine looked back to that sudden death as to "the loss of a beautiful estate," and his feeling of loss was embittered by a sense of having been duped and wronged. Without a doubt, his wife's death had left a permanent impression upon his habits and character; but that he was still sore-hearted, could not be true.

Lillian would have said so to herself, if she had questioned her own thoughts, but she was not conscious of thinking upon the subject.

She was one to whom several men had been rather hasty, in declaring love and offering marriage, and when, at their several meetings, she had found herself deeply interested in Fontaine, she had felt a quiet satisfaction in the thought that here was a man who was pledged to his past; that she could talk with him and walk with him, and enjoy to the full the atmosphere of virile effectiveness that was inseparable from his presence. She was a dreamer and highly imaginative; he was just the opposite, and in that fact lay a charm. She welcomed him with frank pleasure, when he called at Mr. Hollis's. To herself she said:

"He shall be my special freind, for he is very

noble!" and in the pride and joy of that thought, she had given him that glorious smile from the carriage.

"I must see her again, before Edith comes," he said to himself. He knew Edith would be in the city at no distant day. He knew also that she was rather exacting of attention, and brooked no rivals, even in friendship.

Looking over his letters and notes that evening, he found an invitation from Mrs. Colby to a five o'clock tea at her home, on the following afternoon. For two reasons, he decided at once to attend. First, Mrs. Colby was a very old friend, intimately associated with some of the profoundest moments of his life, and he owed her the courtesy of an acceptance. His second reason was the more prevailing of the two; he knew he would meet Lillian Crandall there, for her sister, Mrs. Hollis, was the social running-mate of the judge's lady.

"A Riley Tea," he read from the dainty card. "I'll ask Atwater what that means." The doctor, being familiar with the social life of the city, was sure to be invited. Not more than half a dozen other statesmen received special cards to

this unique five o'clock. Saturday was full of legislative business, though the morning session was short. As the speaker and Dr. Atwater were about leaving the State House, in the afternoon, they ran across Judge Colby. He was a short, corpulent man, with a red face, and on this occasion he was in a decided condition of splutter. His countenance expanded into a smile, however, as he met the speaker and his companion.

"Going up our way, gentlemen, aren't you?" he said. "Those ladies of mine have bound me up with pledges, to be there too, and I haven't the time; really I haven't. Promised my wife to attend to an errand or two, which I've clean forgotten till this minute, and now it's too late. But I'll pay my way out of the scrape. Don't forget your wallets, boys."

"Church affair, eh?" said Fontaine. "Glad you mentioned it."

"Not exactly, but something resembling it; a benefit for a free kindergarten. No gimcracks for sale, but they'll make you pay for what you eat and drink, and pretty dearly too, I suspect," and the judge went chuckling down the corridor.

CHAPTER VIII

"Old Fashioned Roses," said Atwater, as he and Fontaine entered the Colby drawing-room. A soft, pink light flooded the apartment, which was wreathed and festooned with roses—only tissue paper ones, to be sure, but the imitation was clever, and the effect charming. Over the piano hung a lithograph of James Whitcomb Riley, framed in "wave-printed bark of sycamore," with a loop of roses thrown over it. Other copies of the picture were in other rooms; one surrounded and half hidden by a snarl of fishing-lines and flies, and one fastened to the wall with "lithe stalks of barley, topped with ruddy gold." An intimate familiarity with the poet was manifest at every turn.

There was a tea-table, presided over by a tall young lady in a rose-colored gown.

"Queen rose of the rose-bud garden of girls," quoted the doctor, while Bruce pressed forward

and asked for a cup of tea. Miss Crandall's face, when she turned to him, flushed softly, then instantly paled, as was its mysterious way. He took his cup from her hand and withdrew a step, while Atwater bought his beverage and drank it, standing near Lillian. After he had finished and given back his cup, he still lingered, talking to her and pretending to assist her. His manner was easy, and all his movements deft and graceful, as a doctor's should be. He looked well and talked well, and Lillian evidently found him agreeable.

"And he is her very old friend," thought Bruce, with a pang of envy.

But when, after the doctor withdrew, she summoned him back to the table with a look, he had no room for envy in his heart.

"Stay here for a little while," she said. "Presently I shall be relieved then I want to show you through the house."

A few more cups of tea were dispensed, and then a blonde in a gown of sea-green brocade took Lillian's place, and she took Fontaine's arm and conducted him away, moving slowly through the crowd of people that filled the rooms.

"When the frost is on the pumpkin—" he said, breaking into a laugh of surprise and pleasure, as passing through a curtained archway, they came upon a novel bit of stage effect. In an alcove stood a tall shock of Indian corn, brought miles for the purpose of standing a few hours in that elegant room. The long, green-brown leaves rustled slightly, as they were brushed by the garments of the merry crowd, and emitted a characteristic fragrance.

Just in front of the corn-shock, on a table, stood a mammoth pumpkin, glittering with diamond-dust. It was hollowed out, and partly filled with broken ice, on which stood a huge cut glass bowl, foaming over with sherbet. The delicious stuff was ladled out by one of Mrs. Colby's daughters. She had an aigrette of corn-tassels fastened in her black hair, and around her waist was a rope of pumpkin vines—artificial of course—with a bunch of their crumpled yellow blossoms dangling from the ends.

A new side of life was being displayed to Mr. Fontaine—the æsthetic, artistic side. It was a little strange, but altogether charming.

"How wonderful you women are," he said, "to imagine all this!"

"O, it was all easy enough," replied Lillian, "knowing Riley as we do, and loving him."

"You mean, liking his writings," corrected Fontaine.

"No," she insisted, "we love the man and his books."

Two crystal cups of sherbet were passed to them, and they disposed of it leisurely, standing in the shadow of the corn. Shouts of laughter came from the farther side of the hall, and Lillian said:

"'The Raggedy Man' is over there, peddling apples, and 'Elisebeth Ann' is selling hot coffee and—what else, do you suppose?"

"Custard pie, of course," said Fontaine. "Shall we have some now?"

"O, no, wait awhile," she answered, laughing.

A small, sallow girl appeared. She wore a blue print dress, with a pink arm-hole apron, buttoned down the back. Her hair was in two tails, and her round, solemn gray eyes looked unutterable things. Some one lifted the slender child and stood her on a table. The laughter and chatter rippled down to silence, and in a weird, low voice she recited:

"Once there was a little boy
At wouldn't say his prayers,
An' when he went to bed, at night,
Away up stairs,
"His mammy hurd him holler,
An' his daddy hurd him bawl,
An' when they turned th' kivers down,
He wasn't there at tall!
"They seeked him in the rafter-room,
The cubby-hole and press,
They seeked him up the chimney flue
An' everywhere, I guess;
"But all they ever found of him
Was this, his pants and roundabout.
An' th' gobble-uns 'll git *you*
Ef you don't watch out!"

"Where did you find such a charming 'Orphan Annie?'" some one asked Lillian, who seemed to be identified with the evening's entertainment; and she replied:

"She is one of Bess Colby's Sunday scholars. We have had her in mind for this a good while."

The little girl was moving about among the people, carrying a big gourd dipper filled with favors—tiny booklets of drawing-paper, tied with narrow ribbon, and decorated with a pen-drawing or a couplet from one of Riley's books.

"Gobble-uns," she piped; "who'll buy my gobble-uns?" Most of the souvenirs had a brownie or an elf-child sketched on the outside. Bruce pressed forward to buy one.

"Let me select a nice one for you," said Lillian. "I made most of the things myself, and some are done better than others. Ah, here is one without any dreadful little picture—just a rhyme inside "

He took it, without reading the rhyme, and after holding it a moment, begged her to tie the ribbon in his buttonhole, which she did.

"I should dearly like to buy all those pretty favors, if I might," he said.

She laughed merrily at the idea.

"What would you do with them?"

"Keep them to look at and dream over," he said.

"Do you ever dream?" she asked.

His eyes swam, and melted into hers, as he replied:

"I feel as though I were walking in a dream to-night."

"You should not turn dreamer," she said, softly. "It is for women to muse and dream.

For men there is the glorious world of action."

He outstayed Atwater, and indeed almost every one else. He asked her to sing something for him alone. Seated at the piano, she looked up with a smile and said:

"This is a Riley night, and the song must be one of Riley's."

She struck a few soft chords, and sang in a slender but exquisitely sweet voice:

"Just as of old! The world rolls on and on;
The day dies into night—night into dawn—
Dawn into dusk—through centuries untold—
Just as of old.

"Time loiters not. The river ever flows,
Its brink or white with blossoms, or with snows;
Its tide or warm with spring, or winter cold;
Just as of old.

"Lo! where is the beginning or the end
Of living, loving, longing? Listen, friend!
God answers with a silence of pure gold—
Just as of old!"

As he was taking his leave that evening, Fontaine spoke of the ball to be given in honor of the Assembly by the mayor and city officers, on the following Tuesday night.

He said;

"It will be a sort of free for all affair, I suppose, but I wish you would let me take you. I should love to dance with you again."

"I will go, with pleasure," she responded; "and it will be my last ball for a good while. Lent begins the following day. It comes early this year."

"Do you regret it?" he asked.

"O, no!" she replied; "I look forward to it with pleasure. It is good to have a time of quiet thought and frequent worship."

"I fear you would think one like myself a great heathen," he remarked.

"Why should I?" was her reply. "I do not know what you believe, but it is possible, I think, to live a good life and please God without praying regularly or very often. After all, what is religion, in its ultimate, but conduct?"

She seemed to wish to stand upon his plane, or at least to diminish a felt distance between them. There was a faint trace of bitterness in his voice as he said:

"I fear the standard of conduct which you would approve, would make this crooked world an impossible place for men to live and act in."

"Why will you compel me to disagree with you?" she said, with a kind of sweet petulance. "I would erect no standard more severe than that of an enlightened conscience. Simple rectitude can not be very difficult;" and she half sang, half recited these words from the poet of the night:

"Just to be good—
This is enough—enough!

* * * *

To let the thirst for worldly power and place
Go unappeased; * *

Ah! though we miss
All else but this,

To be good is enough!"

When at length Lillian saw Mr. Fontaine depart, she turned back into deserted rooms. She stayed with the Colbys that night, and assisted the girls, Bess and Marian, about clearing away the artistic disorder of the *fete*.

Bruce went home, stirred to the depths of his moral being. He knew he was on the eve of a trying crisis in his legislative career. A measure of grave importance was being quietly canvassed by the members of the Assembly, pending its discussion in open session. The influence

of the speaker was sought, both by the advocates of the measure, and by those opposed to it. It would be difficult to explain to the uninitiated, just how, and to what extent legislation is influenced by the speaker of the house; but that it is so influenced is an undisputed fact. During that night walk to his hotel, Fontaine rose to a point of decision. If he had wavered and temporized before, putting self in the balance always, as he weighed different lines of action, he would do so no more. Simple rectitude should not be too difficult for him.

CHAPTER IX

The municipal ball was a somewhat crowded affair, but to Mr. Fontaine it was an occasion of unmixed pleasure; for Lillian was on his arm, when he entered the ball-room and when he left it, and he danced with her many times.

She was playful and piquant and charming; and he felt that she must share the happiness which filled his own heart to aching.

He no longer asked himself if he loved her. Every pulse in his body, every yearning of his soul asserted it. He had hardly reached the point of questioning whether she returned his love. His own delicious emotions, for the moment, filled his cup of joy full enough.

Once, between dances, they met Atwater and his partner, a little beauty of eighteen, one of his many city friends.

"May I go to church with you to-morrow?" he asked Lillian.

"Assuredly you may," she replied. "Do not

forget it, for I shall wait for you, and I dislike being late."

"Church—to-morrow?" queried Fontaine, and Lillian explained: —

"The Ash Wednesday services at St. Stephens."

A little later Fontaine inquired:

"What do you do during Lent?"

"O, the usual things," she said, "except such things as this."

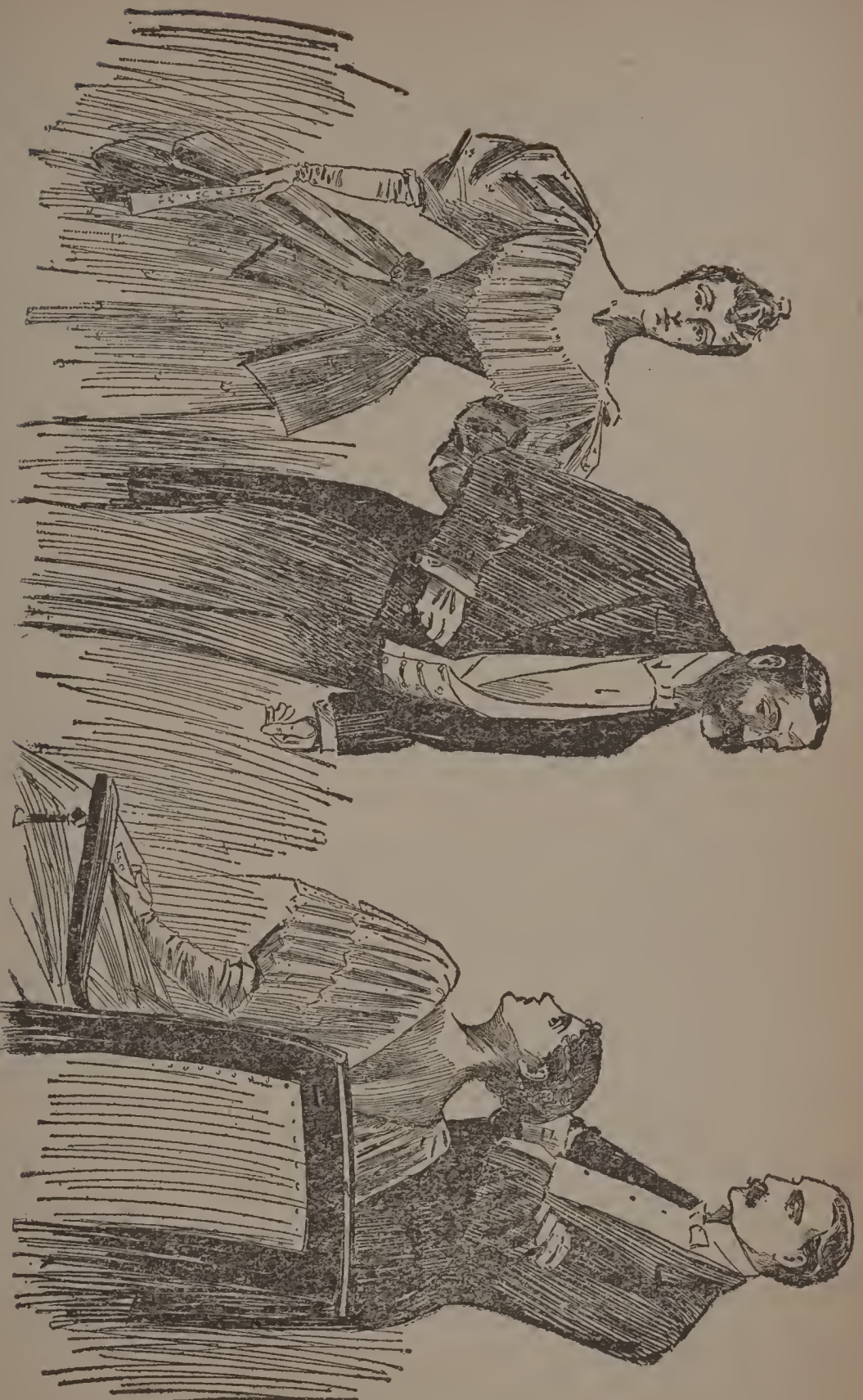
"And the theater—you will regret the Irving-Terry week."

She shook her head

"From childhood I have been accustomed to accept the lenten season, with all its small sacrifices, as a blessing. It is such to me, and I no more regret the amusements I forego, than I am capable of desiring improper ones at other times. It is largely habit, I suspect."

The sweet night ended in the morning hours, but not before Fontaine gained the assurance that Lent need not interrupt his intercourse with Lillian.

The following day Doctor Atwater appeared at his desk, only a few minutes before the noon



“May I go to church with you to-morrow?” he asked Lillian.

adjournment. There was an added carefulness about his always neat attire, and Fontaine knew he had just come from the service at St. Stephen's, which he had attended with Lillian.

The speaker felt like censuring the gentleman from Ellers, for absenting himself without leave. He had been on duty himself, since nine o'clock. The committee on inspection of the journal, of which he was chairman, usually did its work in the morning; so whatever his dissipations may have been, it was rarely possible for him to make up lost sleep. He was usually able to command sleep the moment his head touched the pillow, and his great physical energy enabled him to work upon a minimum allowance of the balmy restorer. The fact, however, that he had been in bed a scant three hours out of the past thirty, may have had something to do with his irritation against the polished, suave doctor, with whom he had never before felt like quarreling.

That afternoon a man entered the hall of representatives, who instantly attracted to himself—as a lodestone attracts steel-dust—all the irritation and animosity of which Fontaine's rather bland temperament was capable.

Ferdinand Slicker was a perpetrator of unproven felonies, a criminal out of prison, and one who would probably always walk at large. Bruce had known him since he was a boy of ten, and the other a bully of fifteen. Their fathers had been acquainted and lived near each other for years, always frankly antagonistic. In '64 the elder Slicker made money as a substitute-broker, and took pleasure in calling the elder Fontaine a "copperhead." Ferdinand was at that time too young to serve his country, but his older brother won renown as a bounty-jumper.

In appearance Mr. Slicker was dark and slight, with small hands and feet, a bulging forehead and jet black hair, mustache and chin-whiskers. The only pursuit which he could place in evidence was that of managing officer of a graveyard insurance company. Atwater, who knew the man by reputation, had dignified him with a scientific name. He called him the *Scincoid*.

The reason of this man's appearance in the House was as well understood by the speaker as if he had written him, telling him when he

was coming, and what he was coming for. He was an outrider of the army of lobbyists who would swarm through the city and into the State House, whenever the much talked of fee and salary bill came before the House for final action.

Early in the session the Senate had framed and passed a bill, which amounted to a complete revision of the existing statute regulating the compensation of state and county officers. The people of the state at large had asked that such a revision be made, not so much in the interest of economy as for the sake of equity and justice. The reform was aimed at the fees. It had long been possible under the law, for certain officials to enrich themselves by a system of constructive fees, wholly unjust and in many instances oppressive. Most of the country members had come down, pledged to their constituents to do away with this abuse, and all felt that something must be done.

The Senate bill received a first reading and was referred to the standing committee on fees and salaries. From that hour it was the focal center of legislative interest. County officers all

over the state were endeavoring by every possible means to insure its defeat. Ferdinand Slicker understood his business. He was there, in the House, to study the members; to ascertain values; to beguile the unwary; to make bargains with the unscrupulous. For years he had been a factor in State politics. He was a washer in the many-wheeled machine. He subdued friction, hushed the tell-tale rattle and squeak, and collected grime and filth.

Fontaine's hereditary dislike to the fellow never got the mastery of him before; but that evening after adjournment, when Slicker pressed forward to shake hands with him, he affected to have his attention instantly attracted in another direction, and to avoid speaking with him he left the hall by a side exit. The *Scincoid* was not in the least deceived, and his small eyes followed the speaker's retiring figure and glittered with a peculiar malevolence.

That evening, after he had dined, Mr. Fontaine locked himself in his room and slept two hours, before dressing for a call upon Miss Norgate. She had arrived in the city that day, and had duly apprised him of the fact.

On this occasion she was again the guest of Mrs. Froude, the governor's daughter. They were school-girls together at Vassar, and after Mabel Townley married and settled in the capital, Edith seldom let many weeks pass without making her friend a brief visit.

The governor dined at Mrs. Froude's that first evening, by invitation. He preferred his hotel to domestication under any private roof, even his daughter's; but her children amused him, her dinners were excellent, and her frequent invitations were always accepted.

Edith's spirited talk made him forget the passing minutes. He had known her ever since the days of her school intimacy with his daughter Mabel. She had made one long visit at their home in Studor County, a year or two before his wife's death; and he remembered how pleased Mrs. Townley had been with her intelligence and high spirits. He was still lingering in Mrs. Froude's cozy family parlor, when Fontaine entered, and he noted the half-suppressed flush and flutter with which Edith received him. He measured them with his eyes, as they stood in the act of hand-shaking.

"A splendid couple!" he remarked mentally. "Fontaine is lucky. She likes him. He is in a fair way to gather his harvest of prizes, while he is young enough to enjoy them."

A few minutes later he took his leave.

Edith's ripe beauty was at its best that night; but, though Fontaine was not blind to it, it appealed to him in vain. She always dressed richly and in the mode, and no unit of all the thousand small accessories of the toilet was ever forgotten by her, when that unit could add to the elegance or witchery of her appearance. Her movements were the perfection of unstudied grace, and her conversation was never lacking in charm.

After the governor had gone, Fontaine regarded her a few moments with grave attention. She returned his steady look, waiting for him to speak, a smile of happy expectancy on her lovely lips.

"I was thinking," said he, "that you are even more dazzling to-night than on that other night, when I took you to the *Silver Salver*; or did you take me?"

"I believe I took you," she replied; "and I

would remark, in passing, that such compliments from you are not fine. The poor governor was attempting something in the same line, just before you came. Bad form—decidedly bad form!”

“Then what makes you get yourself up in that way? You do simply dazzle, Edith; but I suppose it isn’t right to say so, bluntly. How long is it since you were here before; six weeks or a century?”

His gallantry sounded hollow to himself, and Edith, in her supersensitive mood that night, could not fail to detect the false ring. Something had happened in her absence.

A day or two after her last going home, he had sent her a letter which lifted her heart on a wave of triumph. It was not a lover’s letter, but barely fell short of it. It was written in a mood of happy exhilaration, which he did not himself understand. Edith then let the tumult of her long repressed feeling have its way. She lived and worked and talked with people, day after day, and lay awake at night thinking passionately of Bruce, till the new day dawned.

But no more such letters came. The notes

which answered her spicy epistles were brief and hasty, telling only of business.

"He is overworking," she thought, with a pang of tender pity. She did not expect a visit from him, as that was not possible; but when she could wait no longer without seeing him, she went up to the capital.

"Your work begins to tell upon you, Bruce," she said kindly. "You have lost a little flesh and color."

"Don't tell me I have lost any hair," he said, passing his hand over the thin place on his crown. "I don't mind the flesh, as that may come back, and the color I would rather do without; but I part with my nut-brown locks rather painfully. The fact is I have been following your advice about accepting invitations, and there's where the extra strain comes in. To stand around at a ball, even if a fellow doesn't dance, till three or four in the morning, then attend a committee at eight, and from ten to five preside over the House, to say nothing of having to run the gauntlet of the lobby every evening, all that, I say, is enough to make a lazy man tired."

"I should think so!" said Edith. "You have

been following my advice with a vengeance. Well, if you follow it in future, you will not attend another ball till the end of the session."

"That suits me exactly. Lent begins to-day."

"You absurd boy! What do you know about Lent?"

"Atwater knows; he is a churchman. But because you advise it, is reason enough. I accept no more invitations."

He was the genial, confiding good comrade of old, as nearly as he could make himself such. He talked a great deal, and changed the subject often. When he had gone Edith remarked mentally:

"Something has happened. I must find out what it is.

CHAPTER X

Within a week Mr. Fontaine broke his resolution, and accepted an invitation. This time it was not a ball, but a dinner for gentlemen only, at the house of Mr. Hollis. McNulty gave a knowing tap to his own card, in its big creamy envelope.

"It will be the supper of the season," said he. "Nothing left out that can make a man glad he's alive! I suppose you know, Bruce, what Tom Hollis means by this forgatherin'."

Fontaine affected ignorance and McNulty went on delightedly:

"He has a little axe under the table, that will be brought out later on, for the legislative whetstone. The new school-book law means a fat contract for somebody, and Tom's right in line, with his big printing-house, here in the shadow of the capitol. The educational committee will be there, every man-jack of 'em, and a picked lot of the rest of us, distinguished either for

brains or buncombe. And the next day or the day after, Tom will be around, feeling after that little job. If his wine is what it used to be, I'll tumble to anything he wants;" and with an airy flourish of his hands, and a careless laugh, McNulty strode away.

Fontaine's time was so exactly filled, during the days and evenings that intervened, that though he wearied himself with longing to see Lillian, he could not possibly call upon her at any conventional hour. With Edith it was different. She would talk with him while she took her breakfast, or rise after she had retired, and dress in ten minutes, for the sake of a five minutes' interview with him.

Between Lillian and himself the distance seemed to him so great that, though he was consumed with impatience, he feared to intrude, and waited his time. He went to Hollis's banquet hoping to meet her, if only for a few moments; but was not at all certain that he should, for on such occasions the ladies were usually invisible.

A striking incident occurred that evening, illustrative of the character of the girl he loved, and he was witness to it.

Mr. Hollis's guests were, with one or two exceptions, assembled in the library, and the dinner hour was almost at hand. Bruce missed his handkerchief, and went out into the hall, to get it from his overcoat pocket. Fortune was kind, for just then Miss Crandall's voice reached him—the voice he loved.

A tall Japanese screen stood half way down the hall, partly hiding the doors opening into the family parlor, and the conservatory at the end. Lillian was speaking to some one beyond the screen. As Fontaine turned to re-enter the library, he could see the group. A tall negro servant stood motionlessly erect, holding before him the "wee nippie" tray, with its spirit-lamp, copper kettle, glasses and liquor-flask. He was on his way to the library, and Lillian had intercepted him.

"Do not take that tray into the library, Ephraim; I forbid it," she said.

"Pahdon, miss, but Mistah Hollis' ordahs—"

"I can not help it," she interrupted in a low, earnest tone. "Mr. Hollis will not reprove you. I will see him myself."

Just then Hollis appeared on the scene, from

the back parlor, and comprehended at a glance, his sister-in-law's attitude.

"Go on, Ephraim," he said.

"Stop where you are, Ephraim," said Lillian. Then turning to her brother-in-law she said, softly, hurriedly:

"Tom, you *shall* not take brandy into that room. Swithin McNulty is there! It would send him off on a week's debauch!"

"Swithin sends himself off, when he goes," said Hollis. "Go on, Ephraim." But before the man could obey, Lillian seized the flask, and with a dextrous throw, sent it flying through the open door of the conservatory, where it crashed among the flower-pots.

The darky stood motionless and expressionless as a bronze statue, holding his tray before him, till Hollis, whose momentary anger gave way to amusement, said:

"Take the tray away, Ephraim, and stand guard over the sideboard. No ladies in the dining-room, mind you."

Some light wines were served at dinner. Fontaine, alive to some newly awakened sense of responsibility, turned down his glasses. No

one followed his example, and even Doctor Atwater sent in his direction a glance of mild surprise.

The dinner was a prolonged but not tiresome affair. The *menu* and attendance were excellent, the host urbanity itself. The talk was both sensible and witty; and the readiest man with jest, repartee and toast, was the Irish member, as McNulty was facetiously dubbed. Fontaine, as well as others, was struck by his appearance that night. His shapely figure was well set off by evening dress. He was fond of flowers, and nearly always wore a bunch on his coat. That night it was red carnations. He had markedly handsome hands, and as he talked, sang and laughed, his fine solitaire flashed conspicuously, with their quick, graceful movements.

The "little axe" was not in evidence that night.

How much may be crowded into certain brief seasons of a man's life! From the moment when Bruce Fontaine sprang out of bed at seven in the morning, mind, spirit and body were strung to the point of effective, responsive ten-

sion. He read the papers while he breakfasted. Then came the revisal in committee of the previous day's journal. At ten he took his place at the speaker's desk, and for hours guided the oftentimes fractious, sometimes turbulent assembly, with the alert precision of a skillful teamster driving a mettlesome four-in-hand over a mountain road.

The legislative term was two thirds gone, and a great bulk of business was yet to be accomplished. Members were grumbling about delayed reports, and clamoring to have their bills handed down. The first weeks of the session were consumed chiefly by parties who had individual measures to push, and were skillfully persistent in engrossing the attention of the House. This abuse—the abuse of turning the General Assembly into an agency for forwarding special interests loomed up in startling proportions before a few thoughtful, conservative men, who possessed at least a modicum of the spirit of true statesmanship.

The necessity of a constitutional amendment, lengthening the term of an assembly's sittings, was another matter made vividly apparent at

this session. The weeks which were enough, sixty years ago were not enough now, and for the new goveror to call an extra session, would lay him open to the charge of reckless extravagance, by the opposite party.

County and township bills, ditch bills, road bills, school bills and a multitude of other bills, ranging in importance from a bounty on owl scalps to a revision of the general tax-law, had accumulated on the speaker's desk and awaited a final disposition. Members were jostling each other for precedence, and besieging the speaker and the House for attention to their pet schemes.

Through it all, Fontaine preserved a cool head, and while endeavoring to steer clear of direct personal collision, used his influence to dispatch the most important business and forward the ends of good state-craft.

Still he was blamed, and as the session wore on he became aware that the House contained a knot of disaffected men, who, upon slight provocation, would develop into active enemies. The laxity of many who had preceded him, in the matter of enforcing some of the standing rules, had created a certain precedent, which he

was expected to follow. When he struck out on new lines, his course was stared at by these men, in cold surprise, which finally turned to hot dislike.

Mr. Ferdinand Slicker continued to visit the State House, haunting the corridors and cloak-rooms, intent upon performing the work for which he was paid, that of defeating the fee and salary bill. Shorehill and Kane, two members who had taken offense at Fontaine, made common cause with him, and the three were often seen together.

One day, about a week subsequent to the Hollis banquet, Edith Norgate made a visit to the capital with Mrs. Froude. After a brief call upon Mrs. Froude's father, in his private office, they went to the representative's hall. Edith had never seen Bruce preside, and on this occasion she found him in a testy humor. Time had been wasted, and nothing accomplished that would redeem the day's journal from being a record of trivialities. The speaker's voice rang out with a certain sharpness, and the suspicion of a frown darkened his brows.

When the two ladies entered he glanced up

to the gallery where they were seated, and recognized them with a bow and smile; then turned to give the privilege of the floor to "the gentleman from Haines." The aforesaid gentleman, a slow-spoken cattle-dealer, proceeded to harangue the House upon the enormities practiced by the west side stock-yards. At the end of his drivel, recognition was granted "the gentleman from Cameron;" and that boyish-looking member hastened to make the concise statement, that the legislature had just as much right to regulate the business of the Hartford Insurance Company as it had to interfere with the stock-yards.

These inanities failing to interest Edith, she sat at her idle ease, admiring the graceful columns of the gallery, and the rich coloring of the mullioned windows. Then her glance wandered from man to man, throughout the wide hall, but always returned to the speaker. Her thought was:

"How perfectly he suits me!"

A spasm of emotion, half pain, half delight, contracted her heart, and sent a mist of tears to her eyes. A happy and satisfied wife, view-

ing her husband in an assemblage of other men, has a moment of tender pride. Something of the same fond feeling moved Edith, but it was tinged with sickly doubt and hope deferred.

There was a little stir at the main entrance of the hall. Judge Colby's florid face appeared. He was speaking with a doorkeeper, who immediately passed in a party of four ladies, and another attendant conducted them to a comfortable sofa on the north side of the hall, which commanded a good view of the House. The party consisted of Mrs. Colby and Mrs. Hollis, who always made one visit to each branch of the legislature, during its session, and of Misses Marian Colby and Lillian Crandall.

As they were being seated, Edith turned from them to regard Fontaine. On his face was a new look—one she had never seen before. Only such hypersensitive observation as hers would have noted the passing expression, as his glance fell upon the tall, slender figure of Lillian. The subtle strangeness which had hung about him of late was explained. He had a secret, and the secret was this other woman.

Edith sat as in a suffocating dream. The

yeas and nays were being called upon something, she did not know what. The roll-clerk finished the tedious list with "Mr. Speaker," and Fontaine voted "aye." At the same moment he beckoned to Mr. Maddox, of the ways and means committee, and that gentleman advanced with dignity and took the speaker's place. Fontaine descended from the platform and went over to the ladies, seated outside the bar of the House. It was an unusual and very marked attention, and many heads were turned in his direction. The judge's lady and Mrs. Hollis rose and greeted him impressively. He saluted the young ladies, and moving a chair to the end of the sofa, seated himself near Lillian, who turned to him the face he worshiped, with its shadowy, oriental eyes, and cheeks like pomegranates.

He remained by them during their short stay, and when they departed he accompanied them to the door and around the corridor, to the entrance of the Senate Chamber. When he returned, he lifted his eyes to the ladies' gallery; but Edith and Mrs. Froude had gone. Once again on the rostrum, his attention was drawn to Atwater, who had risen in his place, though

not for permission to speak. His eyes were upon his desk, and his hands were nervously shuffling together some papers, which he transferred to his breast-pocket. Then, without glancing in the direction of the chair, he left the hall. His face looked strangely old.

CHAPTER XI

The speaker's face wore a look of benign content. What mattered it that he had somehow managed to displease both his oldest and truest friends? What mattered it, that the worst bore in the assembly had risen to a point of order, and wandered to a point as remote from the matter in hand as the antipodes? When he had taken leave of Lillian, at the door of the Senate, he had said, for her ear alone:

"When may I come to see you?"

And she had answered softly:

"To-morrow evening, after eight, I shall be disengaged."

The house adjourned that afternoon at five o'clock, and immediately afterwards a page came to Mr. Fontaine with a message, requesting his presence in the room of the committee on fees and salaries. He found there, besides the committee, a number of the strongest men from the towns, Maddox, Kemp, Burnet and others, with

a representation of county members of the solid sort, like Breck of Stillwell.

The subject before this caucus was, of course, Senate Bill number 9, and an amendment to the bill which the committee had decided to submit. Much to his surprise Mr. Fontaine found himself standing alone, or nearly so. The effect of the bill upon the next general election was what almost every man present thought of, solely and altogether. The speaker went out from the conference, feeling that he had surprised his conferees, and wondering somewhat at himself.

His first impulse was to go and talk the matter over with Miss Norgate. Some latent sense of loyalty to an old tie made him determined to do so, and comfortable habit made it easy.

Deep in his heart rested the anticipation of the approaching interview with Lillian—"tomorrow evening, after eight"—and it filled him with tender joy. Should he tell her then of his love? He did not know. The emotion within him was strong enough to subdue unseemly excitement and haste, and fill him with gentle patience and sweetest hope.

As he was about leaving the Helicon House

that night, he met Doctor Atwater, who had just entered from the street. There was a professional air about his carriage, and even in the sound of his footfalls, as he came down the tiled floor, directly toward Fontaine. The latter met his grave glance with a conciliating, boyish smile, and laid his hand familiarly on the doctor's shoulder. He did not know what was meant by the film of alienation which had come between them of late. He only knew that he loved his old chum, and would not easily be shoved to a distance.

"I have just come from McNulty," said Atwater.

"Why, where is the boy?" asked Fontaine. "I have observed that he has not been in his seat for three days. A rumor reached me yesterday that he was ill. I have intended looking him up, but have been crowded with business, till this evening. I could go now and pay him a visit. Where is he?"

"At the Sherwood. He left this house, you remember, some three weeks ago. He is never settled long in one spot. He is in a bad way now, and you had better not call to-night. I am going back presently."

"Who is his physician?"

"Dr. Haskins has the case in charge—genuine *mania a potu*. I was called in at Mack's request, this afternoon. It appears that through the fall campaign he abstained from stimulants entirely. That shows what he is able to do. All winter, however, he has been drinking more or less, and that night at Tom Hollis's banquet he began to bowl up for this. He never turned in that night at all, and you know he has been in the House only two or three times since."

"I ought to have looked after him," said Fontaine, in a pained tone.

"So ought I," said Atwater. "His brother Mark—a fine young fellow that—called for me at the House this afternoon."

"Is he violent?"

"Not all the time, only restless and all broken up. He has times of raving, when he would destroy himself if he were allowed the chance."

"We must keep his condition a secret, if possible, on account of—many reasons," said Fontaine. "And when I can be of any service, day or night, let me know."

"I will," said Atwater. "I thought you ought

to be apprised of the reason of his continued absence from his seat in the House. As for keeping his condition secret, circumstances make that an exceedingly difficult matter; but we will do the best we can."

As Mr. Fontaine stood waiting for a car which would take him to within one block of Mrs. Froude's residence, a procession of unanswerable questions trooped through his active mind. His was not a consciously philosophical temperament, but the lack of a comprehensible sequence, in the general scheme of things, filled him with a passing irritation. Why should a brilliant and strong man like McNulty become the slave of a degrading appetite? Lillian's spirited action, on the night of the banquet, looked pitiable to him, on account of its futility. She must have known that wine would be plentifully served at dinner, so why throw away the brandy? As Tom had said, "Swithin sent himself off." Individual integrity played but a sorry part, on this crazy planet of ours. Why should he himself take a stand on any question, which would make him a target for spite and ridicule?

He was strangely disturbed, and turned his

thoughts resolutely to other things. Then suddenly the face of the girl he loved beamed upon his mental sight, and he noted the sweet curves of her lips and chin, as she chanted softly for him:

“What though we miss
All else but this—
To be good is enough.”

“I am turning sentimentalist,” thought he. When he rang the bell at Mrs. Froude’s, he felt sure he had come to the right place for a cure.

Governor Townley was cozily ensconced in front of his daughter’s parlor fire. One of his pretty granddaughters was leaning on his shoulder while the other, a child of five, sat on his knees, listening to a story of grasshoppers that talked and wore swallow-tailed coats; and of strawberries so large that a little girl could eat one out hollow, and then build a baby-house inside. Little Flossie clapped her hands and exclaimed:

“And the light, coming through the walls would be such a lovely pink!”

Mrs. Froude and Edith laughed merrily at the baby’s idea, and the handsome, white-haired gentleman laughed too, as he remarked:

"You see Flossy inherits her imagination."

"It is a clear case of atavism," said Mrs. Froude, "for if my life depended upon it, I could never invent such stories as grandpapa does, to amuse these little wonder-lovers."

"Let us plan our grand picnic all over again," said Flossie, "just as we did the last time you were here."

But the governor declined going over in detail the program of the most delightful picnic that was ever conceived. A hint of the magnificence of the proposed affair was given by Clara, the older girl.

"Just think of the lemonade there will be, when a million lemons are squeezed into Reed's lake, and men come with wagon-loads of sugar, and shovel it in, like it was sand!"

Flossie was about to add other items of description, equally extravagant; but her grandfather succeeded in hushing her up, and both children were bribed to go to bed, by the promise of a long drive on the morrow, in the governor's carriage.

Mrs. Froude was just leaving the parlor with the little girls, when Mr. Fontaine was an-

nounced. He was very cordially welcomed, but for the first time in Edith's company he felt himself *de trop*. Both gentlemen seemed slightly embarrassed, and the governor very soon took his leave.

"What made him hurry off?" asked Fontaine. "I did not come to run any other fellow out, least of all His Excellency, the Governor."

"O, he is at home here, you know," said Edith, "and comes and goes as he pleases. I have no idea your calling had anything to do with his sudden departure; though a visitor does sometimes feel prompted to go, when a fresh one appears on the scene. At least, I felt that way this afternoon." Bruce laughed.

"If you had remained ten minutes longer, I should have climbed to the ladies' gallery, to shake hands with you."

"That would have been courtesy overdone," said Edith. "When I visit the legislature of my state I do not ask a 'suspension of the rules' on account of my presence."

Her voice was liquid and musical as ever, and her smile bland and sweet; but Fontaine felt that he was out of favor. He was somewhat

out of favor with himself, and rather coveted reproof.

Sitting there alone with him, Edith felt her irritation melting away. Her glance wandered over his face and person, noting every familiar line, and the unuttered cry of her heart was:

"He is so dear—so dear! I have known and loved him so long, and I am losing him forever!"

"When is Senate Bill No. 9 coming up again?" was her next remark, and Fontaine replied:

"Next week, I think, the bill will be finally disposed of. I will endeavor to have it brought forward as early as possible, now. It ought not to be postponed any longer."

"I would let the committee and the House run that bill in their own way, if I were in your place," she said.

"Perhaps I might as well," said he; "but I am really interested in the passage of the right kind of a fee and salary bill; very much interested, indeed."

"I would curb my interest, and exercise my prudence," said Edith. "There will be the wildest mob of a lobby in town, next week, that

ever besieged a state house. The people want the bill passed, and the man who actively opposes it will not be forgotten by them; while the member who throws his influence in favor of it, will incur the enmity and future opposition of the office-holders and local politicians. But why do I tell you all this, when you know it as well as I do?"

"You are giving me a friendly caution. I thank you for it, though I fear it will be thrown away."

"I suspect as much," she said. "The fact is, Bruce, you have stunned me with surprises this winter. What call was there for you to offend members of the assembly and others, by enforcing rules that had been trampled upon for years, till they were practically dead?"

"Rules, Edith!" he broke out; "that all narrows down to a single matter, almost too squalid to talk about with a lady. Five or six men are mad at me, because I closed up the bar in the basement of the capitol. There is a joint rule forbidding the sale or display of intoxicating liquors in or about the State House. Old man Spooner—the lieutenant governor, I should say—

united with me in demanding that the stuff be removed. The engineer of the building had charge of it, and kept himself so full that he was unfit for his duties. He and the general custodian, and perhaps four other men, have done a lot of private kicking; but I don't care. I have no use for a legislator like Shorehill, who cannot wait two hours between drinks."

Edith had turned a trifle pale, and her lips wore a meaning smile.

"I did what I did," said Bruce, "because I thought it right. How does that sound to you?"

"Callow—very callow indeed. Yours will be no exception to the usual fate of reformers. I can not get over my wonder at the change in you. I supposed that no man knew better than you, that to be politic was the way to get on in politics."

"I like to do as I please."

"But in a wise and methodical order; success comes before power, and power before independence. A man standing just where you do must trim his sails for all winds. I very much fear you will not be the youngest congressman ever sent down by the old State."

To this he replied:

"I'd like very well to go to congress. I'd like to go early and go often; but whether I do or not, I have determined to go on record, in this fee and salary business. I shall manage that the bill, with the proposed amendment, is debated in committee of the whole, and that will give me an opportunity to speak to the question, on the floor of the House."

"And you will speak, of course, in the interest of *right*."

The sneer in her voice was very evident, though her fair face showed only the kindest interest. She rose hastily, gathered up a couple of books from the table and carried them over to the piano, in a purposeless way. Returning to her chair she broke out:

"I wish I were in your place just now. I wish I were *you*. I would look back over my early struggles for an education and a start; over the hard, good work I had done; over the rapid strides of these last years, and the triumph at the opening of this session, and I would *love Bruce Fontaine* to the extent of ignoring every earthly consideration that stood in the way of

his success! I would press and strive till I had gained a vantage ground so high that I could fearlessly afford to take the higher ethics into my plans of action. A striving man can not always afford to do that."

"Perhaps not," said Fontaine, thoughtfully.

She fancied she had impressed him, with her logic of self, and continued:

"If a chemist, now, should think it his duty to swallow a dangerous drug, in order to ascertain its true properties, you would think him unwise."

"*Sans doute*. I'd tell him to try it on a dog."

"Because a corpse—political or other—ceases to be useful in the world. Because to commit suicide puts an end to all practical effort, toward any result whatever."

Then she laughed, and repeated the phrase, "try it on a dog," and after a moment remarked:

"I venture to say, Bruce, that I am the only woman of your acquaintance who has ever heard you use slang. That's because we fished together, with pin-hooks, off the end of the same old log. Don't be vexed at what I have said to you, and don't forget it."

"I'll not forget it," he replied dutifully; but she little guessed the exact impression her words had made.

CHAPTER XII

Fontaine sat, or rather reclined, in an easy chair before the open fire. He had picked up a pamphlet from the table and made it into a roll, and with it he gently tapped his knee, as he gazed with a peculiar smile into the purring flames. Edith grew restless, as he continued to muse. She arose and lighted a scone over the mantel, and laid another lump of coal on the grate.

He watched her movements with his old time admiration for her graceful manner, but in the light of her recently propounded doctrine of self, she was on the farther side of a great gulf fixed between them. Once his ambition would have taken fire, at the flame of hers, but not to-night. Was his ambition dead? He knew it only slept, fearing to startle some new-born motives and emotions which fluttered, half-fledged, in his consciousness.

“Simple rectitude can not be very difficult.”

How he adored the innocent unworldliness which could say that from the heart!

To Edith, the impress of another personality, the effect of another mind than hers, upon the strong-natured man before her was clear as the light of day. When she contemplated the fact that another woman younger than herself, with undeniable beauty, and the air of a gracious princess, had waked in his breast a tenderness which she could never stir, she could have cried out in resentment and groveled in jealous pain. When she thought of this other girl holding him back from a brilliant career, she was stung with pity, and would by any manner of means have rescued him. What effort would she not have exerted to save the friend of years from the fatal risk of meeting with one whom she considered weak and narrow, incapable of keeping step with a rising public man.

A thousand conflicting emotions and thoughts passed through her mind, as she rearranged the small articles on the mantel, and looped back a silken drape whose fringe was swaying in the chimney draught. Resting her arm on the marble, she lifted one small, French-booted foot to

the fender rail. It was icy cold, as were also her hands with suppressed agitation.

How calm he was! Would he never lift his eyes, or move? She pulled a creamy tea-rose from a jarful of them on the mantel, and brushed it slowly across his mustache, filling his nostrils with its rich fragrance. Then he caught her hand, and took the rose out of it, and after giving the velvet palm a playful scratch with the prickly stem, he drew the latter through his buttonhole.

She went to a little table in the corner and rattled a box of chess-men, looking at him over her shoulder. He shook his head with a smile.

"Not to-night, Edith. I should like to dawdle over a game for two hours, but have as many hours of writing to do, before I sleep."

"Poor boy!" she said. "How I would love to do it for you!"

He looked at her gratefully.

"You are very kind," said he, "and I know how excellently well the writing would then be done; but I must do it myself."

When he was quite ready to go, she gave him her hand.

"Good-night," she said, looking up at him, her face whiter than he had ever seen it.

"It seems like good-bye. Changes are impending, perhaps for both of us. I have a feeling that we may never meet again on the accustomed footing. Kiss me, Bruce, for the sake of old times."

He caught her to his breast and kissed her cheek and brow, and last of all her hand, but did not touch her lips.

She turned back to the hearth and stood there, her proud head drooping. The petals of his rose were lodged in the bosom of her gown. She picked them out, one by one, and dropped them on the coals.

"What could have been her meaning?" Fontaine questioned, as he braced himself against the wind and strode down street, his pulses slightly quickened by that parting act.

"Changes impending for both of us. Is it possible she is including the governor in her careful plans? If no party reverses occur, the next assembly will elect him to the United States senate. There can scarcely be a doubt as to that, and Edith knows it as well as another.

He is not a rich man, but Edith can carry the airs and manners of wealth, without the actual thing, better than any one I know."

Again he recalled her peculiar pallor, the tremor of her body, in his embrace, and the coldness of her smooth cheek, as he kissed it.

"She is a strange girl," he said to himself. He was aware that she could follow an impulse recklessly, but that she could suffer deeply, on his account, did not occur to him.

Throughout the following day the minutes dragged, and the hours seemed interminable. The speaker presided over the House mechanically, lifting his eyes many times to the broad clock dial, over the main entrance to the hall. The words and scenes of the past night seemed far removed. He lived only for the night approaching.

Atwater was absent from his seat the entire day. Fontaine knew he was with McNulty. He decided mentally that after his visit on Bernard Street that night, he would go down to the Sherwood, and stop with McNulty as long as the doctors would let him.

CHAPTER XIII

Few longed-for passages in life, prove quite what anticipation paints them. Fontaine's evening with Lillian, by her own appointment, lacked something, of the exalted pleasure which had wreathed it in his hopes. He thought, as he sat in her presence that night, that he had sometimes been nearer her in a crowd, or in brief moments of meeting or parting, than at that hour, when they were by themselves alone. At such remembered moments she had turned to him, with a look in her dusky eyes which had penetrated to his inmost being, and he had answered it with one of fire and dew, from his own.

His heart, that night, was so full of the one great question of destiny, that his remarks upon any subject sounded to himself vapid and trivial. He asked her to give him some music, because he wished to be silent; and because she too found it difficult to converse, she felt a sense of relief at the request.

She seated herself at the piano, and spreading open an old music-book, began the recital of a dreamy, uplifting composition. He observed that the score was in manuscript, and went over to the instrument, to look at it more closely. She paused in her playing to explain that the symphony was one of her father's composing.

"He is a genius in music," she said, "and indeed in other things. I wish you could know my father." Then she waved him back to his chair with a smile, and began the passage once more. She played on and on, while minutes passed.

"You must say when you have had enough of this. I never know when to stop."

He nodded, without speaking. The sweet tones filled him with a passionate pleasure; but he knew he listened and enjoyed as the uncultured do. He understood absolutely nothing of music, as a science or art. There were so many things which formed a large part of this dear girl's life, of which he knew himself to be hopelessly ignorant! What would she think of him, if she knew him just as he was?

The ring of the door-bell reached them

through the music, and a little later Ephraim came to the drawing-room door, with a card on a silver tray.

"It is Doctor Atwater," said Lillian. "Rather a late hour, for one as ceremonious as he."

"That means that I have stayed an unpardonable length of time," said Fontaine.

"O, no!" she said, with a lovely smile. "This is your evening, and it is not nearly gone yet."

Atwater entered at that moment. At sight of Fontaine an expression of surprise crossed his face, which was very pale and serious looking. Then suddenly he turned to him, with an air of earnest confidence.

"I am glad to find you here," he said. "I have a request to make, or a favor to ask, or"—he hesitated a moment—"a suggestion to lay before Miss Crandall. It is of a singular character, and I count upon your help, Bruce, to prevail upon her to consider it favorably."

Turning to Lillian, he went on:

"I have not forgotten the remarkable power you possess to soothe and relieve the sick by your will-power and touch."

She sat down, making a deprecating gesture with her hands.

"O, Doctor, do not speak of that! I would willingly forget it forever!"

"Forgive me, Lillian," he said, touched by her evident distress. "How can I forget it, when I see every known and understandable method of science set at naught by a demon of disease? I know what I promised, the last time, at home; but I could not help thinking of you again to-night. You have that wonderful gift; it can not be denied."

"I would gladly throw it away, if I could."

"It is a gift of God," said the other solemnly. "But you must not do too great violence to your own feelings. You are entirely justified in refusing to see this case, if you choose to do so. It is a very painful one to see."

Fontaine felt a rising indignation against Atwater, whose visit and words had moved Lillian so strongly.

"Is your patient a lady or a child?" Lillian asked.

"Neither," was the reply. "The patient is a man, and the case is one of delirium tremens."

"Swithin McNulty!" exclaimed Fontaine. "Atwater, you surely do not think what you are asking. For one like Miss Crandall to see a stranger in such a state would be hard enough, but one who was once a friend, or at least an acquaintance—"

"I know," the doctor interrupted, "I should not have come. But you can not conceive what efforts we have made to save him; and to give up now, goes hard. And there is his brother begging us to do something more."

"Poor Mark!" said Lillian. "He is devoted to Swithin."

"I know Mack's history," Atwater resumed; "and while I blame, I also commiserate him. He began drinking under pressure of overwork and speculation. He was in a certain southern city, where if a man doesn't patronize the local product, he can't do business. Of course he drank incredibly. For a time last autumn he surprised every one by keeping sober, but this winter he has repeatedly yielded to temptation."

"And temptation assailed him in this house, not two weeks ago," said Lillian, rising to her feet. "I tried to shield him, but I could not."

Doctor, I will go with you, but I must start at once. I dare not pause to consider. Will you not go too?" she said, turning to Fontaine, who of course had but one answer to make.

Then she hesitated, and seemed to quail again, from the undertaking.

"My sister is out of town, and she or some other lady should go with me."

Fontaine suggested Mrs. Colby, and Atwater said:

"My carriage is at the door; I feel sure she will accompany us, but I will drive to her home and see."

"She will not refuse, if I ask her," said Lillian. "Her house is on our way, and we will call for her; it will save time."

"You are goodness itself!" said Atwater.

She went up to her room for hat and furs, but did not tarry to change her dress. As she came down, drawing on her gloves, she said to the tall negro who lingered about the hall:

"I am going out, Ephraim, with Mrs. Colby. You can tell Mr. Hollis so, if he asks for me, when he comes home. And you need not sit up. I will let myself in, if it is late."

In the parlor, she turned to Atwater with the question:

"What is it you expect me to do?"

"I hardly know," he replied; "but remembering your remarkable influence over Ralph Oliver, away there at Los Gatos, I could not help wondering whether you might not be able to quiet McNulty. His case is most pitiable. He is a massive creature, full of blood and nerves. He has a large brain, which has been in command of well-trained mental forces. Now the whole colossal structure is in ruins."

"Does he know the people about him?" asked Fontaine.

"Not to-day, with any distinctness," was the reply. "When Doctor Haskins first saw him he was rational, with the exception of momentary illusions. The case is, in some respects, without a parallel in my observation. He is living in constant, excited action, after having gone without food and sleep for days. There will be a sudden break, before many hours."

"And he will die?"

"I think so. He must die from exhaustion, unless he obtains relief very soon indeed."

"I am ready," Lillian said, and moved toward the door. Suddenly she stopped and turned to Atwater, saying:

"Let us repeat the Apostles' Creed." They turned to the east, and in one voice recited it solemnly to the end.

To Fontaine it was a strange rite, and he had a sense of being an unnecessary third party. At the street door, however, she voluntarily took his arm.

"Do you know," she said, as they went carefully down the icy steps and flagging, "that I say the Creed very much oftener than I say my prayers. My life is so smooth and fortunate that I seem to have nothing to pray for, for myself."

They picked up Mrs. Colby, drove rapidly to the Sherwood House, alighted and went in. Doctor Atwater led the way into a room adjoining the one occupied by the sick man and his attendants. Here the ladies seated themselves, Mr. Fontaine remaining with them. Mrs. Colby was nervous, but Miss Crandall was not. The agitation which she had shown when Atwater made known his errand, had entirely dis-

appeared. Fontaine watched her every movement, as she laid aside her hat and wraps and drew off her gloves. She wore a dinner dress of reddish brown, extremely rich and warm in effect.

Mark McNulty came into the little parlor. Mrs. Colby shook hands with him, and then Lillian did the same, looking up into the boy's pale face with a smile of hope and cheer. His blue eyes filled with tears. In the next room Atwater's voice could be heard, and another voice, weak and hoarse, speaking words of angry refusal. There was a sound of shod feet, tramping restlessly up and down.

Presently the door opened, revealing a large, well-lighted apartment.

"Let us go in," said young McNulty.

"I will remain here," said Mrs. Colby, whose nervousness increased. "Do you mind, if I let you go in with the gentlemen alone?" she asked Lillian, and the latter shook her head.

Fontaine was close beside Lillian, and at the door Atwater placed himself at her other side. The hired attendants had been sent out of the room, and no one was with the maniac but Doc-

tor Haskins, who walked at his side, partially supporting him. McNulty was without coat or vest, and his shirt was open at neck and wrists. Fierce pulses throbbed at his throat and temples, but his face was pale.

"I must get his attention," said Lillian. Mark went up to his brother, and said in a voice of pained entreaty:

"Swithin, stop! Attend a moment. A lady wishes to speak with you."

At the sound of his brother's voice the man turned his wild, blood-shot eyes, first upon Mark, then upon Lillian, who had approached directly in front of him. A sudden, awful terror seemed to seize him. He trembled from head to foot, and a cold dew stood on his forehead and lips.

"What frightful torment now?" he gasped. "Where is the limit to his cruel power, when he can come in the guise of an angel of light!"

He drew back, and raised a threatening hand. Atwater's arms were about the slender girl in an instant, and other quick hands arrested the blow. Then a new, strong spirit came upon Lillian, and she felt herself upborne upon a wave of courage and power. She seized the madman's



"What frightful torment now?" he gasped.

hand in both hers, and holding his wild eyes with her own, so clear and steady, she said, in an intense, ringing voice:

"Listen to me, Swithin McNulty, and believe me! There are no devils in this room! There are none anywhere in the world save such as men's sins have created, for their own punishment. You have suffered enough. God is merciful. He is going to give you relief and rest. Obey me, and sit down!"

Without removing his fixed gaze of fear and wonder, he suffered himself to be led to a large, reclining-chair near the middle of the room, and sank heavily into it. Then Lillian laid her cool palms on his eyes, shutting out the light and pressing down the swollen lids. Standing over him thus, she was simply conscious of a great, insistent wish, to see this tormented being sleep. She felt for him an intense loathing, overlaid and softened by an intense pity. His forearms were tattooed with punctures of the hypodermic needle, and his muscles palpitated like those of a runaway horse, arrested in mid-flight.

Fontaine and the two physicians stood very

near by, fearing treachery, and alert for his slightest movement. But he did not move. Something more potent than bromine or opium was bathing his tense nerves in a kindly stupor. Minutes passed; upon the silence of the room came at length a welcome sound, the regular, heavy breathing of profound slumber. They placed a chair for the delicate, silken-robed girl, and she seated herself beside her charge, holding one of his sinewy wrists in each small hand.

After all had grown quiet, Mrs. Colby stole in, and took a seat near Lillian. The room grew chill, and Atwater brought her fur wrap and laid it over her shoulders, and placed a hassock for her feet. She thanked him with a smile, but did not move her eyes from the sick man's face. She sat thus for nearly two hours, then left him, still sleeping profoundly.

Fontaine took the two ladies home. Mark McNulty accompanied them out to the carriage. To Lillian he said:

"God only knows how grateful I am to you! You have saved a human life. Let that thought be your reward for this trial."

Mrs. Colby talked a good deal, on the way to

her home, about McNulty, and Lillian's wonderful success in quieting him.

"How did you do it?" she asked, and the girl answered wearily:

"I do not know. I do not understand it, any more than you do; but I felt sure from the moment my eyes rested on him, that I could make him go to sleep. It is a mystery, dear Mrs. Colby and all mysteries are unpleasant; so please do not speak of it again to me, and I especially wish you would speak of it to no one else."

They left the judge's lady at her own door, and finished the drive to the Hollis mansion in silence. Fontaine conducted Lillian into the vestibule of the silent house. The gas-light fell full on her face, and he was shocked at her paleness. At the same moment she took his arm for support, saying:

"I am so tired!"

In the parlor she threw off her hat and wraps, breathing with long sighs, and then dropped wearily on the sofa and closed her eyes.

He bent over her and asked:

"What can I do for you?"

"Please get me some water from the dining-room; and be quiet as you can."

He brought it, almost instantly, and after drinking, she returned the glass with a smile and said:

"I'll not faint now. For a moment I thought I should. O, I never felt so tired in my life!"

He uttered some half articulate words of tender pity, as if speaking to a little child.

"I am really all right now, Mr. Fontaine," she said, "and you should go. It is nearly morning—your carriage is waiting, and what is a graver fact, your day's work will not wait while you take your rest. I can sleep all day, if I choose."

He drew up a chair beside her and sat down.

"I should like to remain a little longer," he said, "till you are quite yourself again."

Atwater had put his arm around her and drawn her back, when McNulty made that threatening move. He wondered how he dared do it. He wondered if he might hold her hand. He ventured to take it timidly. It was cold. She let him hold it, till it grew moist and warm in his clasp. Through that slight contact he gave her back something of the energy she had expended. Her cheeks and lips got back their color, and a soft light glowed in her half-veiled

eyes. Presently she rose from her reclining posture and said:

“Now, I am really all right again.”

In the hall they said good-night. She went upstairs, and he went out to the waiting carriage.

CHAPTER XIV

Mrs. Froude breakfasted late, alone with her guest. Her husband, a prosperous lumber-dealer, had left the house at seven, to look after consignments of native walnut and hard maple. His petted wife gave him a sleepy good-bye kiss from her pillow each morning. had a gay good time in her own fashion all day, and gave him a very wide-awake welcome home at six o'clock each evening.

Mrs. Froude adored her father, the white-haired governor. She would have been very happy, if he could have brought himself to make his home with her; but as he preferred another way, she heartily conceded him the right to do as he pleased. She even went so far as to concede him that right, in her mind, when it dawned upon her that he might be contemplating marriage, and with a lady a trifle younger than herself.

She loved Edith for her own sake, and she

knew her admirable tact and adaptability. Things would always go smoothly where she ruled, for she would compel smoothness by sheer pressure of her own strong individuality. To herself she said:

“She would take good care of the dear old man. She would assist him at his duties, as no secretary could, and at the same time preside most gracefully over his home. She would fill his days with life and interest. He fancies her, and it is a good idea.”

Over the breakfast cups one morning, a few days after Fontaine's last visit, she said to Edith:

“What would your father do, if you were to marry?”

“He is not in the least dependent upon me for a housekeeper. Aunt Ruth is always there, you know. If I were obliged to give up assisting him in his editorial work, that would, indeed, be a serious matter. He is old and feeble, and ought now to sell the paper and retire. I would gladly go out of that line of work, and use my pen upon something less ephemeral.”

“But marriage might put it out of your power

to use your pen at all, with any purpose or continuity. What would become of you then?"

Edith laughed and said:

"What put the question of my marrying or not marrying into your head just now, Mabel?"

"O, I always get around to that, you know," Mrs. Froude replied. "And I'll own that I've thought of it more than once, in connection with the brilliant young speaker of the House. If he were less young or you, my dear, a trifle younger, it might be just the thing."

Edith's acute perceptions made her aware that, in reality, her friend did not think it just the thing at all. She led her on to speak of Fontaine, however, by remarking:

"Bruce has more than once said to me that he did not like young girls at all. And though no longer a lisping miss, I am a whole half year younger than his highness the speaker. But I agree with you in thinking there ought to be more difference in age."

"O, a great lot more difference!" declared the little matron, who always talked to Edith like a school-girl. "But he is the sort of man to win the interest of women and girls. No woman

could be indifferent to him, whom he chose to impress."

Edith listened fascinated.

"He is less self-conscious than any man I ever met; yet he is handsome, and commanding, and as correct, I suppose, as you might expect any man in his position to be—though you can not be sure of a man's morals till he is at least fifty. There is one girl in this fine old city who has felt his charm."

"You perhaps refer to Lillian Crandall," said Edith, speaking with careful indifference. The cheek nearest the fire had grown redder than the other. She picked up the morning paper and, folding it small, used it as a screen.

"Have they been seen together much, this winter?" she asked.

"Not very often, but occasionally. They say he visits at Hollis's and Tom runs after him a good deal. But Tom never does anything, during a legislative session, but cultivate the influential members; and he usually reaps profit in some form."

"You perhaps base your surmises as to their caring for each other, upon what we saw at the

State House the other day. I should say there was nothing in that. Bruce has that impressive way of addressing himself to ladies. There were years when he never addressed them at all. But I can remember the years before that."

"I do not say he cares for her," said Mrs. Froude. "I should rather say he did nothing of the kind. But I saw them together at the municipal ball, a few nights before you came, and Lillian looked to me every inch a girl in love. He appeared, not exactly diffident, but cautious; as if he had a piece of rare porcelain or Venetian glass in charge, and was not quite certain as to the proper way of handling it."

"And she was condescending, of course."

"Of course, as you say—very gracious indeed, but condescending. I am proud, and as a rule I like proud people, but honestly and truly, Edith, I dislike such pride as hers. I dislike that whole churchly lot! They are narrow and haughty! I once invited Mrs. Lew Parvin to an informal luncheon. I could see, by the lifting of her brows, that I had made a mistake. And very soon she informed me that it was a saint's day or a fast day, something or other of that kind, and she could not consistently accept."

"She is one of the very strict ones, I have been told," said Edith.

"And Mrs Judge Colby is another," Mrs. Froude continued. My father just lifted her husband to the supreme bench, two years ago, as certainly as though he had been the governor, and placed him there by appointment. Last winter, when Dr. Steele was holding evangelistic services here, and his eloquence was calling out the entire city, I ventured to ask Mrs. Colby to attend our church with me one evening. She smiled superior, and said she had never cared much about noted preachers. With her the altar was higher than the pulpit." Edith laughed, and said:

"I think you got off very easily, after the liberty you had taken."

"Their church is a threadbare convention!" declared Mrs. Froude with emphasis; "and they are all slaves to conventionalism. By the way, what do you think of Lillian's practicing faith-cure in Ellersport? There is an overstepping of the usual limitations, that I confess surprised me. I wonder if Mr. Fontaine ever heard of it."

"Yes," Edith replied; "I mentioned the sub-

ject to him once myself. I have forgotten what he said."

"I fancy," said Mrs. Fronde, "if he believed it, he would think twice before marrying a woman whose children were likely to be nervous freaks, mesmerists or clairvoyants."

"O, Mabel!" laughed Edith; "how you do run on about any one you don't like!"

The two ladies adjourned to the morning parlor, and Mrs. Froude ordered the carriage for an appointment at her dress-maker's.

Edith picked up a writing pad, and began penciling a leader for the *Hillhurst Times*, which would be quoted and commented upon by half the papers in the state. The article was a skillful setting forth of what Miss Norgate knew and believed and predicted, touching the proposed salary law.

The subject was at the moment the most important one in the public eye. It occupied the little knots of legislators which could be seen standing about corridors and committee rooms, and in the hotels.

The people of a state are supposed to do the law-making of the state, through their repre-

sentatives. Usually they are content to stand more or less quietly aloof, in the attitude of decorously interested spectators of the legislative hippodrome. Letters of advice are sent to members, and the State newspapers voice an undertone of sarcastic grumbling over the ineffectiveness of legislatures in general and the inane uselessness of the particular body then sitting. Periodically, however, some long felt public want needs attending to; the tax-laws must be tinkered, or the criminal code revised. Upon this assembly had fallen the duty of interfering with the perquisites of an army of office-holders, and the representatives were about as comfortable as barefoot boys in high oats, with the oats full of yellow-jackets.

For days the agents of the office-holding interest, with Mr. Slicker as commanding officer, had been getting in their work at the capital. It was an open secret that members had been, so to speak "held up," and their opinions and pledges asked for, at the end of a repeating weapon, charged with threats and direful prognostications. Money and promises were freely employed, with, in some instances, humiliating results.

Early in the session the Senate framed and passed a fairly equitable fee and salary bill, and sent it on to the lower house. The House committee held it for weeks and at length submitted it with an amendment which made of it a pitiable compromise. Under its provisions, county officers then serving, as well as all those elected at the last general election, could go on under the old statute, and were not to be affected by the new. Many of these officers had a four years' term before them, and the probabilities were that the next assembly could be wrought upon to repeal the law, before its workings had been tried.

"It is a humbug, of course," said Mr. Maddox of Lambert; "but let it go through. We will have passed a fee and salary law, as we promised, and the kickers will have been quieted as well."

This kind of farcical legislation was no new thing to Fontaine. For a moment he was tempted to say:

"It is the best we can do." Then came a revulsion of sentiment, and with a sudden flash of temper he declared:

"It is not the best we can do. It is cowardly to go back on the Senate in that way. We asked them to make a bill for us, and they sent us a good one. Now to pass it with an amendment that kills its practical use as effectually as to strike out the enacting clause, is too small work for me."

CHAPTER XV

Mr. Maddox was thoroughly demoralized. He came down intending, for his part, to carry out the pledges made by the party in the autumn, to rid the counties of the cumulative fee nuisance. But the extent and determination of the opposition dismayed him. He said to Fontaine:

"The party has more to fear from the state wire-workers, who are opposed to the measure, than from the people at large; and I've about reached the conclusion that it will be the best party policy for us to defeat the bill, or pass it with the amendment."

"I do not regard the matter as simply one of party peril or policy," said the speaker. "The party can take care of itself; and in the long run, it usually takes care of the fellows who make the best use of their brains in the cause, not only of the party, but of the public interest as well."

Mr. Fontaine could always count upon a cer-

tain following; and when the bill came up, and was debated in committee of the whole, Mr. Maddox in the chair, the speaker took the floor and made what was universally conceded to be the strongest and most effective speech of the session. His terse eloquence had the telling merit of coming from sincere conviction, and as the discussion progressed he could see that many eyes were being opened to the absurdity of passing the bill, with the stultifying amendment. After placing the bill in order for the following day, the committee rose at a late hour.

On the next afternoon, the hall of representatives was a scene of ill-suppressed excitement. The space between the walls of the room and the brass rail that formed the bar of the House, was packed by a determined lobby favoring the amendment. The friends of the amendment in the seats, Mr. McNulty being of the number, kept up a continuous murmur, like a hive of bees. The consideration of the fee and salary bill had not been set for a particular hour, and it was purposely kept back, and time consumed by other and less important matters, till toward the usual time for adjournment.

At last it was brought up, and a hush settled over the packed lobby. They knew a vote was pending, and the only influence left them to use was that of their united presence. The debate began again on the amendment; it had progressed but a short time, when suddenly, as if in response to a signal, Robertson of Belmont, a quiet old gentleman who had not been heard from half a dozen times during the session, rose in his place. A score of men were on their feet at once, claiming recognition, but Fontaine said, in his firm, resonant tones:

“The gentleman from Belmont.”

And Robertson, trembling with excitement, moved that action be at once taken on the main question. They tried to drown his voice, but the motion was promptly seconded by Breck, and the speaker put it in due form. The House was a bedlam. McNulty stood in the aisle brandishing his fist, and upon refusing to sit down, when ordered to do so, Fontaine in the voice of a major of dragoons declared:

“If the disorderly gentleman from Scott does not instantly resume his seat, the sergeant-at-arms shall remove him from the hall.”

McNulty sat down.

Some one called for the yeas and nays, on the previous question, and the roll clerk began at once, a score of pencils keeping the tally. A page ran up to the speaker's desk with a note—Edith's last word of warning from the gallery.

"If the House ties *don't, vote!*"

"A tie! a tie!" went with a ricochet over the house.

"Mr. Speaker," called the roll-clerk, and Fontaine promptly voted "Aye"—at the same moment giving his head an airy toss and casting a laughing glance at Edith in the gallery. The Senate bill became a law, without the House committees' amendment. It meant a matter of a few thousands apiece to some hundreds of office-holders. It meant also, a matter of a few dollars apiece to some thousands of citizens, to whom the units were of as great moment as the thousands to the others.

"On your head rests the good or ill of this act," said Atwater to the speaker, after the adjournment, which followed immediately upon the vote.

"Your course was very straightforward, and you steered the measure safely into port, with you own hand. Whatever the results, you are largely responsible."

The same assertion was hurled at him, in a different tone, by the blatant mob into which the friends of the amendment and their backers resolved themselves.

"When Robert Bruce Fontaine comes up, as a state or national candidate, he'll hear from this," said one.

"Candidate!" shouted another, with an oath. "His case will be settled in convention. There's where our little game will come in!"

"What's the matter with McNulty?" asked Fontaine of his friend the doctor, before they separated that night. "He has behaved like a lunatic about this fee and salary business, ever since his recovery and return to his seat. Is it possible that his brain is still affected?"

"I do not think so," said Atwater; "and I do not believe he cares a fig whether the clerks and recorders get their usual pickings or not. But he is generally disgruntled with himself and the world, and he seems to have conceived a strong dislike to both yourself and me."

"I think that rather strange under the circumstances," said Bruce. "I have never done him an unkindness, and you have, as I know, rendered him valuable service."

After a moment's thought, Atwater continued: "His recovery seemed like a miracle, from start to finish. After that long sleep, he took food and rest regularly for two days and came out then, a well man. But he seems to have lost something morally, which he cannot get back. He has gone several steps downward in his associations. The *Scincoid* and Shorehill are with him constantly and a fellow named Dent."

"*That* hound!" said Fontaine.

"Where does he belong?"

"He used to belong right here in the capitol. You couldn't have had much to do with the State House bar, or you'd have seen him. He was the general custodian at the beginning of the session. When we enforced Joint Rule No. 21, he was very angry, but kept rather quiet. A while later I discovered he was still smuggling whisky into the basement. Then I reported him to the governor, and had him removed from

his office. Since then he has been making dire threats. I'm very sorry Mack has fallen in with that crowd."

"Yes, for if he drinks, however gradually, he will fetch up where he was two weeks ago, and then it will be all day with him. Mark keeps a close watch over him, and tells me Swithin confines himself to the tonic his physicians prescribed, and is not drinking; but one can never tell."

They were in the reading-room of the Helicon, and Fontaine, who was attired for the street, turned to go out, when Atwater spoke his name, and came toward him, a little diffidently:

"There was one thing I—Miss Crandall left town very soon after that night."

"The next night, I believe," said Fontaine. "I have wanted to ask you whether you knew why she went. I called at the house, but there was no one at home but servants; and I do not know Hollis very well. I thought perhaps you had heard from her."

Atwater shook his head.

"Perhaps I did wrong, to take her there that

night. She may have heard of it the next day in a way that annoyed her; and it was something of a trial at the time."

Fontaine reflected that he only knew how much of a trial it had been. To the other he said:

"I have felt more anxious over the matter than you would understand. And—because I cannot do otherwise—I am going to Ellersport to see her, the first hour I can call my own."

He said this with a look and tone whose deeper meaning Atwater was not slow to read.

During the remaining days of the session Fontaine hardly talked five minutes at a time, with a single member. The appropriation bills occupied the House, and a number of minor bills had to be carried through as "riders." There was the usual wrangle for attention to pet measures, and the usual inconsequent dispatch of business that characterizes the final round up. Several times, during those last days, Fontaine's innate kindliness prompted him to approach McNulty as though no cloud of any sort had ever come between them. He pitied the bright, erratic fellow, and had always liked him. He

had known him do generous, unselfish deeds, and save for his one failing, he was interesting and lovable. He met the speaker's advances with a cold civility, entirely unlike the frank, genial nature that he was. His old cordiality was gone, and he himself seemed to be going—no one could tell whither.

The assembly closed on the tenth, with a night session. The governor and other State officers happened to be present; and after the *sine die* adjournment, they with others—strong and good men—gathered about the speaker, and gave him hearty congratulations and thanks.

"I am proud of your approval," he said briefly. "I've made plenty of mistakes, no doubt, but I've done the best I could."

How rejoiced he felt, that the long strain was over. He liked work, and would take it up again in some form, to-morrow or next week. But the satisfaction of having completed a somewhat wearing task was enough for that night. And before any future plans of action could be decided upon, the vital question of his heart must have an answer. He learned that Mrs. Hollis was at home again, and he knew

Atwater had called. He would have spoken to him again about Miss Crandall, but something in his friend's manner restrained him.

CHAPTER XVI

Lillian did not sleep all day, following her visit to the Sherwood, as she had implied to Fontaine that she would. She awoke about ten the next morning, feeling refreshed and strangely happy. The events of the past night recurred to her; she did not dwell upon them, but resolutely put them aside.

She decided for once to be very lazy, and take her breakfast in bed. She rang for a servant and gave her order, and then peeped out through the heavily curtained windows. It was snowing steadily and a stiff north wind was eddying and whirling through the street. She said to herself:

"No one will come to-day. I will take my coffee, and then doze a while before I dress."

Secretly and very earnestly she hoped some one would come. She remembered Fontaine's solicitous kindness, when he brought her home. She recalled the look of concern on his hand-

some face. Ah! it was tender concern, and his low-spoken words had an accent of endearment that she could not forget. And then he had taken her hand and held it, in a gentle yet close clasp, and the half dying, exhausted feeling had passed away, and she had grown strong and quiet. With shut eyes and smiling lips, she recalled minutely that last hour, even to the humorous look in his eyes, when, as he bade her good-bye in the hall, he invited her to come again to the State House. He had said:

“There will be some exciting days before long. It may even be dangerous on the floor, but the ladies’ gallery is always a safe place ”

Lillian wondered if he would not call that evening to learn whether she was entirely well. Without admitting it to herself, she confidently expected he would. She arose and dressed before luncheon. No one was at the table at that meal but her brother-in-law and herself. Mr. Hollis told her, as an item of news, the fact that Mr. McNulty was ill; had not been in his seat in the House for over a week.

“And the outrageous feature of the case is,” said Hollis, “that he is laid off with the jim-

jams. They say he has gone through with a grizzly program this last week, but is better now."

Lillian said not a word, and Mr. Hollis continued:

"It is utterly incomprehensible to me, how a man with McNulty's sense and natural force of character, could make such a degraded spectacle of himself, and be such a bore to every one who feels the slightest interest in him."

"Have you visited him?" Lillian asked, and he replied:

"No, visitors are not in order. Atwater and Fontaine are the only members of the House who have seen him, I am told. They are all trying to hush the matter up. Doctor Haskins says he is confined to his room with asthma. Mark, poor lad, is telling lies and using money to keep the papers from getting onto his true condition."

With his wonted facility, Tom wandered to another subject, and before the meal was concluded he got around to Fontaine, and his position on the question then absorbing the interest of the legislature.

"I see," said Lillian, "the morning *Herald* criticises Mr. Fontaine for some of his late rulings and intimates that it is contrary to parliamentary precedent for the speaker to manifest an active personal interest in any question before the House."

"The *Herald*," said Hollis, "wants the fee and salary bill defeated, or passed with the House committee's amendment. Fontaine is strongly in favor of its passage as it came from the Senate. I don't quite understand him. It's a ticklish business, altogether, and no man ever had a better chance to stand from under a trying responsibility. As it looks on the outside, Fontaine is a Quixotic fool, in being so conspicuously active when he could so easily remain neutral. But I don't believe he is a fool of that sort, or any other. He knows what he is about, and Miss Edith Norgate knows also. There is no sort of nonsense about her, and her influence over Fontaine has always been very strong. She is in town now, and he visits her constantly."

"Yes," said Lillian quietly, "I know she is in the city. I saw her in the gallery of the representatives' hall a day or two ago; she was with Mrs. George Froude."

"And I saw Fontaine coming away from Froude's only night before last. She is a showy piece, and smart enough for a lawyer. They say Governor Townley acts as though he'd like to share his future honors with her. They, with the Froudes, made a box party at the Park Temple the other night. Sid Raymond says the governor was particularly well groomed, and very attentive, not to the play but to the lady."

"I thought men never gossiped," said Lillian, as she rose from the table.

"O, but they do, outrageously," laughed Hollis with bluff frankness.

The snow continued to fall and Lillian wandered uneasily, through the large, silent house. Mrs. Hollis had gone away the day before, to spend a week with a friend in a neighboring city, and Lillian felt the solitariness of this splendid childless home, as she had never done before. She looked about her, at all its costly and tasteful appointments, and exclaimed to herself:

"If I were Dorothy, I should hate all these things, if I could not have a child! O, I should wish for a houseful of them—splendid boys, who would look and speak and walk like their father,

and dear daughters to wait upon and caress him!" She was all alone, but a warm blush mounted to her cheek at the unbidden thought, accompanied as it was by a momentary image of one about whom she constantly mused.

A little later the Colby girls called, in their carriage, to take Lillian with them, if she were so disposed, to a meeting in the parish house of the Sisters of St. Agnes. Mrs. Colby had explained her absence from home the previous night, by stating briefly that she had been sent for to visit a sick friend. Her girls never pressed her for details, and they could scarcely have imagined the weird, pathetic scene of the past night, in which Lillian had been the most striking figure—a figure to impress the memory and imagination, even more than that of the unhappy drink-victim.

Lillian was a member of the sisterhood whose pleasure and duty it was, during Lent, to work for the poor, and she accompanied Bess and Marian gladly. The three girls talked and laughed incessantly, from the moment they entered the carriage till they reached the parish house. They talked everything and nothing—

chiefly nothing, as is the way of giddy maidens, and Lillian enjoyed the frothy chatter, just as did the others, because she was young and light-hearted and was happy in the companionship of her friends.

All through the afternoon, a swift thought would now and again flit through her mind:

“Would Mr. Fontaine come that night?”

The sweet young sisters spent several hours over their charitable schemes, and then went into the church, where a service was held in the early dusk. The church was lighted by a few gas-jets about the chancel and over the altar. The radiance of the sunset sky came through the great west window, and took the rich colors of the glass. Lillian knelt with a throbbing heart, and through the penitential service, which she tried to follow devoutly, ran the under note of a personal prayer, not for pardon, but for greater happiness.

“Dear God, make me sure of my love’s love!”

Was it blame-worthy or shame-worthy for her thus to pour out the passionate treasures of her heart unasked? She never raised the question, and why should we? She was a child of

nature, richly and peculiarly endowed; sensitive as the mimosa leaf, and affluent of feeling, as the lily of perfume.

Fontaine, busy from an early hour, having a dozen absorbing matters claiming each moment of his time, did not cease to think of her. He knew it would be impossible for him to call upon her that night, and feeling an unconquerable desire to communicate with her in some way, he determined to write her a note and beg a reply. This was the letter he sent:

“DEAR MISS CRANDALL:—

“I have thought about you very often to-day, and wished as often that I knew whether you had entirely recovered from the fatigue and exposure of last night. I would come in person to find out, but as matters are in the House to-day, I can not get away, without running away. Would it be asking too much, to beg you to send me just a line by bearer, to assure me that you are well? My concern is very real.

“Yours faithfully,

“R. BRUCE FONTAINE.”

Lillian had been gone with her friends, perhaps half an hour, when Fontaine's messenger

called at Mr. Hollis's with this note. Ephraim opened the door.

"A letter for Miss Crandall. Will wait for an answer," said the boy.

"Miss Crandall is out driving," drawled Ephraim, taking the letter and slowly closing the door.

The messenger went back to Fontaine and reported. His first feeling was one of gladness that she was indeed well; for as he had said, his concern was real. Then followed a sense of regret at having missed her reply. He thought it possible that she might send him a note by post, for she would doubtless find his letter, immediately upon her arrival at home.

But no word came, either that day or the next. He wondered a little, but he had no thought of blame, or sense of pique in connection with the matter. There was some reason, concerning which he would learn when he learned the rest.

CHAPTER XVII

The stars were out, and the street-lamps all a-glow, when the Colby carriage set Lillian down at her brother-in-law's door.

Mr. Hollis was in the library, where the small family always assembled before going in to dinner.

Lillian went up to her room and laid off her hat and wraps, and then ran lightly downstairs and into the library. In her sweet, girl's voice she said:

"Am I late to dinner, Tom? You, by the way, are a little early;" glancing at the clock on the mantel.

Hollis was standing on the rug, looking at the fire. He turned slowly, as she came forward, and she could see in an instant that the usually good-natured man was angry.

"If you are late, you are excusable," he said, ironically. "Professional people can not always be punctual. I suppose you have been visiting patients."

"Visiting patients! I have been to the parish-house and to church with the Colby girls."

"Were you out with the Colby girls last night?"

"No, I was out with their mother. I suppose, Tom, you have learned that I was at the Sherwood, and what for. I only hope you have learned the simple truth, unadorned and ungarbled."

He replied in a cold, hard voice:

"I have learned enough to authorize me to forbid your ever again doing so eccentric a thing, while a member of my household."

"I did not want to go," she said, with a pathetic tremor in her voice. "Doctor Atwater came for me. Mrs. Colby went with me. Where was the wrong? What have you heard?"

"I heard your name mentioned down town, by strangers, in connection with Doctor Haskins. I went to Haskins and he told me all about it. I have expressed my mind to you before, about this sickening fad. Lillian, I tell you, you have nothing to gain by taking this headstrong course, and everything to lose."

"Tom, I have told you that I went against my own will, so how can you call me headstrong? And what, pray, will I lose?"

A look of low cunning came into the man's face as he said:

"You will lose Bruce Fontaine, if he hears of this. He is a man of sense, and would despise such a piece of sensational folly, as quickly as I would."

She grew white with anger, at this indelicate thrust, but replied calmly:

"I believe I should regret the loss of Mr. Fontaine's friendly esteem rather more than the loss of yours." Then a sense of amusement touched her as she recalled the words, "if he hears of this."

"We will go to dinner now," said Hollis, pompously, "and no more night rides, remember, to treat Dr. Haskins' cases. And such a case! That erratic, ill-balanced fool of a McNulty—ten to one, he has been shamming from the start!"

"Tom," said Lillian, "I wish you to know that I consider your words and tone and manner ungentlemanly and offensive."

"And I," said he, "wish you to understand that your coming home at two o'clock in the morning, and allowing a man to enter with you and remain an hour, while his carriage waited outside, is offensive to me."

THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

Her dark eyes glowed in her pale face, as she said:

"You have questioned Ephraim. I suppose he told you who the gentleman was, who came home with me."

"He professed not to know."

"And I do not choose to tell you. I do not choose either, to dine with you. And I shall leave your house by the first train that will take me to Ellersport."

They were in the hall, halfway to the dining-room, when she said the last words; and without looking at him, she turned and went up stairs. A few minutes later Hollis appeared at her door, which she had left wide open.

"Come down, Lil, and eat your dinner," he said in a tone which showed that his anger was gone, and he felt only awkward and apologetic.

"I have no appetite," she said, "but I ought to eat, for I have a night journey before me."

"A night journey—nonsense!" he exclaimed. "You must not go away like this. What will Dorothy think? She will be dreadfully pained and worried!" And Lillian rejoined:

"I shall write to Dorothy. She would not



Her dark eyes glowed in her pale face.

wish me to stay where I had received an insult."

He saw she could not be coaxed, any more than she could be bullied, and turing away with a muttered exclamation, he went down to the dining-room. While she was busily packing, a servant came up with some dinner on a tray, an attention for which she was thankful.

She came down stairs, presently, attired for the street, with a small traveling-bag in her hand. Ephraim stood in the hall as usual, and giving him a dollar she asked him to see a transfer agent and have her trunk sent in the morning. Hollis came out of the library and, without speaking, he put on his overcoat and hat and took the bag out of her hand. They walked half a block in silence, entered a street-car and rode to the railway station. There Lillian darted past her brother-in-law, and bought her own ticket. He waited till she turned around, then handed her the bag and strode out of the depot.

Her journey home was dismal enough. The coach was cold and comfortless, and there was a change of trains, and a two hours' wait, at a country station. She reached Ellersport in the chill, wintry dawn, and managed to gain ad-

mission to her home, without disturbing her father. She surprised the old gentleman at his nine o'clock breakfast, and he was overjoyed to see her.

He was a short, stocky man of sixty-five or over, with large, rugged features, and very handsome teeth and hands. He had rough-looking gray hair and a full beard; and under his bushy brows shone a pair of deep-set, thoughtful gray eyes, which filled with happy tears at sight of his daughter.

"Why father," cried Lillian, releasing herself from his bear like embrace, "I never dreamed you wished to have me here, or I would not have remained away so long!"

"That's all right, my child," said Mr. Crandall. "On the whole I like being alone a good deal, and I wish you to spend your winters in the city, with your sister. When you are here a while, I fret myself for fear you are feeling moped and lonely. Still, it gives me a fine sense of pleasure to see your dear face, and to know that you felt constrained to rush home in this sudden way, just to see your old daddy."

"There, papa dear," said Lillian, "I have a

confession to make, and I will make it at once. I did want to see you, now that I think of it, more than I ever did before, when away for a while. I have thought of you almost constantly of late; but that was not the reason of my coming just now. Dorothy was absent and Tom took it upon himself to be dictatorial and disagreeable, and I cut matters short by coming away."

"So you had a quarrel."

"I'm afraid we had. Shall I tell you all about it?"

"No; details are tiresome. Tom is a very common fellow, and none too agreeable to me at any time. If he presumed upon his relationship to thrust his self-complacent boorishness upon you, you did right to leave; but not right to quarrel. But let the matter drop. Dorothy is well, I hope—or I believe you said she was away. I would suggest your making a full explanation to her. She understands Tom. He makes life very smooth for her with his money, and she will defend him. All the same she will exonerate you."

"I have my letter to Dorothy in my mind,

and will write it to-day," said Lillian. "Now papa, tell me the news of the neighbors, and after you have had your smoke we will have old Bayard harnessed, and drive out for a look at the town."

Within a few hours, Lillian had settled into the accustomed routine of the home life, as though she had never been absent. When evening came there was another royal winter sunset, and she recalled that at the same hour yesterday, she had watched the brilliant rays as they strained through the stained windows of St. Stephen's.

"I think John Atwater might have brought you home," Mr. Crandall said that evening, as they sat awhile together, after dinner. "You must have had a beastly uncomfortable journey."

"It wasn't very pleasant," Lillian rejoined, "but Doctor Atwater did not know I was coming, and could not well have left his place in the House just at this time."

"You have seen him often, of course," her father pursued. "He is a man one can afford to spend a little time upon. I rather long, now and then, for an hour's chat with Atwater. He

never did another so crass a thing as to allow himself to be sent to the legislature. A gentleman is sadly out of place in that bear-garden."

Lillian looked up at the strong, bearded face of her father with a glance of wondering reproach.

"What makes you speak in that way, papa? I think the representatives fairly represent the people. There are rough, plain men there, sent by citizens of the same class. And there are other members, beside, Doctor Atwater, who are gentlemen in the fullest sense of the word; men of brains and cultivation."

"An ineffective hodge-podge," Mr. Crandall insisted, as he unfolded a newspaper.

"We live in a republic," Lillian continued; "the lords and commons mingle in both branches of the legislature, and I for one am glad that it is so." She longed to ask her father if he knew anything of Mr. Fontaine, but could not bring herself to do it. The old gentleman spoke several times of Atwater, who was a great favorite with him; but when Lillian was once more in the seclusion of her own chamber, it was not of Atwater she thought, but of another, whose eyes

and voice had expressed such tender sympathy, two nights before. She could still hear his very tones, and the sound of the slight cough that affected his throat that evening. She wondered if he had called at Hollis's. He was very closely occupied, she well knew, but he might have written a line of inquiry. That would have been a polite and graceful attention.

After she had retired and was falling asleep, she distinctly saw, lying on the hall table, in her brother-in-law's house, a letter addressed to herself, in a hand-writing she had never seen before. On one corner of the large envelope was a cut of the State House. She gave a little start, and extended her hand to seize it, which waked her. She said to herself:

"It will come to-morrow."

Tom always sent her letters after her, very promptly, and he would do so now. The following day two letters were forwarded to her—letters which she did not care for. The one for which she would have cared had been carried up to her room, and overlooked.

CHAPTER XVIII

Lillian watched the papers, as the days passed, and read all the reports of the House proceedings. There was much confusion and excitement, the reasons for which she did not fully understand. She was interested only in what the speaker said and did. There were columns filled with wordy debates, and then a tumultuous afternoon session, when a decisive vote was taken. There was a florid account of the savage anger of the defeated lobby, after all was over. Fontaine's name occurred very often, and upon him seemed to fall the wrath of the baffled party in the House.

The political consequences which his course would involve never occurred to Lillian; but she did think with anxiety of his personal safety. His person was dear to her—so dear! His position and prospects only relatively so.

She had written to her sister about her difficulty with Tom, and Mrs. Hollis's reply was just

what Mr. Crandall had predicted. She excused her husband, and at the same time sympathized with Lillian. At his wife's instigation, Mr. Hollis wrote to Lillian a conciliatory letter, full of brotherly advice, and ending with an apology for the words which had offended her. She of course could not do otherwise than accept it.

Dorothy wrote her on the same date, begging her to come back to the city for a week at Easter, and explaining:—

“The letter for you, which I forward with this, I found in your room on the mantel. Norah says it was left by a messenger, while you were out, the afternoon before you went away. Ephraim dropped it on the hall table, and the girl took it up to your room.”

It was Fontaine's note, which she had overlooked in the hurry of that evening, and which she had seen in her dream.

How she dwelt upon each line and word, her heart making much of what was in itself so little. What would he think when he received no reply? She felt an impulse to reply to it now, telling him how it came to be so long neglected; but she feared that would be magnifying its importance.

One day it occurred to Lillian to write a line to Doctor Atwater, asking a question or two concerning McNulty. It had surprised her greatly to see by the papers that he was taking part in the legislative debates, within a week after she had seen him in peril of death. In reply to her inquiries Atwater gave an account of McNulty's very prompt recovery. He wrote:—

“After you left him that night, he slept ten hours; then awoke weak, but rational and decidedly convalescent. The usual medical treatment was continued, and three days later he was back in his seat. His mind retained the impression that a lady had visited him that Wednesday night. He questioned his brother and Mark related to him the whole matter in detail. The effect upon him was just the reverse of what one would naturally expect. Instead of gratitude for his saved life, he seems to feel only chagrin and mortification over your visit. He raged about it to Mark, that a lady, and you of all ladies, should have looked upon his degradation. He was furious at me for bringing you to the Sherwood, saying he would rather have died than that you should have seen him in his then

condition. Mark and Dr. Haskins have tried to change his view of the matter, but in vain. He continues to harbor a deep-seated resentment toward both myself and Mr. Fontaine, who, he knows, was also present that night.

"There, my dear friend, I have answered your inquiries. Now I am hesitating whether I should fold and seal this letter, which is long enough, or say what is in my heart to say. I think I understand you as only a mother may sometimes understand her own child, and your happiness is very dear to me. Let this be my excuse if I overstep my prerogative.

"I believe you are loved by a friend of mine, whom I esteem, but who, I feel sure, is not the man with whom you could link your life, with a reasonable prospect of happiness. I will not say just that. You might be happy, in a way, if you loved him, but you would have to shrink to his measure, spiritually. There would be no more growth. You have taken airy outlooks upon many avenues of existence, whose gates must be forever closed to him. I would not speak disparagingly of one whose solid worth I know; but yours should be an ideal marriage,

into which should enter the broadest sympathy of taste, as well as a comprehensive oneness of conviction.

“He is a man versed in law and politics; honest as a lawyer and politician can afford to be—even more honest, as some of his recent acts prove—but there description ends. His knowledge of things in general is limited. Of such things as literature, painting, music, and the ethics of the best society, it is small. Of religion, the Bible, the history and work of the Church, it is zero. Upon much that enters into your life, and as the years pass should become the larger, finer part of it, he must forever look as an outsider. You are highly, sensitively organized, all spirit, imagination, poetic fire. He is, if not of the earth, earthy, at best of the world, worldly. Some one ought, at any risk, to remind you of these things. I have taken the risk, and spoken dispassionately, unselfishly, as if I were your brother or father.

“Three years ago, in the wild, flower-grown cañon of the Santa Clara mountains, I laid my heart at your feet. You said then you liked me too well ever to love me. I accepted your an-

swer, with a lover's disappointment, but a man's courage and philosophy. To-day I am neither lover nor suitor, but a friend, whose deepest pain it would be to see your life fettered and dwarfed, and robbed of its ethereal splendor. Pardon me if I have been presumptuous, but think on my words."

With a smile, half tender, half bitter, Lillian folded this strange letter and returned it to the envelope. The genuine, solicitous regard of the writer she could not doubt, but she said in her thoughts:

"He is troubling himself gratuitously. He is mistaken. His surmises are groundless, and his warnings unnecessary."

It was not the dark picture of her own retrogression which troubled her, but the wonder and doubt as to whether the limited, worldly man of whom Atwater wrote, really cared for her at all.

Mr. Crandall claimed a good deal of his daughter's attention those days. He had been reading a great deal during the winter, and writing too, upon his favorite hobbies. He had read and written in silence, and now was quite

willing to talk, and air his dissatisfaction with the existing order of things. Lillian endeavored to follow his dissertations intelligently, but had not sufficient interest in the matters which concerned him, to engage him in argument. One day he broke out with:

"I wish John Atwater would come home. He is the only man I can bear to talk with. The only man I could wish to live with, day after day."

"The doctor will soon be at home again," Lillian said. "The assembly winds up on the tenth, and though they claim there is a large amount of business which will be left unfinished, the governor refuses to call an extra session."

"And he's in the right about that," said Mr. Crandall. "The sooner that troupe of mountebanks is disbanded the better."

Lillian smiled, not spontaneously, but cynically. She found herself criticising her own dearly loved father.

"He is distracted," she thought, "over the labor problem, and he has never labored, and does not like the individual laborer. He berates the public service, in all its branches, and he

has never served the public, even by intelligent sympathy with its needs, and with those who are trying to meet them." Then she shook herself, mentally, and looked about her with a vigorous attempt to throw off this strange mood. She started for a walk in the bright sunshine, saying to herself:

"I can not bear to be unhappy, and that is what ails me. I fear it will make me unlovely and unkind. O, if I only knew!"

CHAPTER XIX

It was on that bright March morning that certainty came to Edith Norgate, concerning Governor Townley's feelings and intentions.

They were standing together in Mrs. Froude's parlor. The face of the stately, white-haired gentleman wore a look of earnest gravity, softened by the gentle light in his gray eyes. He had been a brilliant officer in the war for the Union, and his name was loved by brave soldiers throughout many states. He had fought his political battles with skill and honor, and from the high place he now filled he would doubtless go on to others still higher. Edith looked up to his fine, expressive face with an emotion of proud pleasure in the thought that he had offered her himself and his career. The glance she gave him was shy and womanly, and the soldier statesman read in it softness and surrender.

"I do not urge an immediate answer," he said, "unless you are very sure that the love and de-

votion I offer you is welcome. I do not forget that I am old and you are young. I do not wish you to forget it, for a week to come. That much time I insist upon your taking, to deliberate upon my offer. But remember all the time, dear lady, that you have at your disposal the loyal, tender devotion of a man who has never betrayed a trust nor broken a pledge. Now good-morning and good-bye."

He lifted her hand to his lips, and bowed himself away.

"How perfectly right it all was!" she said to herself, thinking over the scene afterwards. "He said and did just what the most fastidious taste would prescribe. His appearance, too, was all dignity—courteous deference and dignity. Not one man in a thousand would have acquitted himself so well. One would always be proud and content."

Then she sighed twice profoundly, and her face for the moment looked old enough to mate the governor's. Edith went home that day.

She had intended to remain till the legislature adjourned; but there seemed to be no reason why she should tarry longer, and she wanted to

get away from the city for the week the governor had given her. She felt an intense desire to see Fontaine once more, but she would not go to the State House, nor send for him, as she had often done before.

After she reached Hillhurst, she resolved upon a final maneuver. She knew her own ability with the pen, and she would write Bruce a warning letter, putting forward, as a warrant, their life-long, intimate friendship. The epistle was a masterly composition, worthy of its author. She approached adroitly and apologetically the possibility of his marriage with Miss Crandall.

"I can not withhold the protest that the thought calls up in my mind. As a woman I know her better than any man could know her, on a longer acquaintance. You are antipodal in temperament, diverse in taste and without resemblance in any particular. We hear much of unlike parties supplementing each other. This applies only to unlikeness in development. Between you two there is the kind of dissimilarity which eventually becomes antagonism.

"You might get over many things; her want of comprehension of your interests, and sym-

pathy with your views. Many a man has gone his way undisturbed by the fact that his wife cared nothing for the things about which he cared most. But the trouble would not end so easily in this case. She has ideals to which she would attempt to shape you. She has habits of life and methods of thought and phases of feeling to which she would try to force a conformity, and failing, would assume the role either of censor or martyr. For she is narrow, yet not weak; but strong in a certain persistency.

"You have seen the Hollis home. Lillian's would be like that—elegant, cold, quiet; for she and her sister are in many respects alike. I have seen their father too, a strange man, egotistical and ill-balanced. I predict he will die insane. I deprecate your displeasure, Bruce; it costs me something to risk it, but I do so in the name of that cant word *duty*, which I hate, but am sometimes forced to use.

"And now, brother mine, a word about my own personal concerns. The Chevalier, *sans peur et sans reproche*, has done me the greatest honor in his power, and I am deliberating a question of destiny. I am no longer a child, to

grasp with both hands at anything which shines. I am waiting and thinking, but must decide before many days. Was it you or Jack Norgate with whom I used to toss pennies, over every doubtful question? Good-bye.

“Edith.”

It was her final *coup*. The reasonableness of her warning might make him pause to think. The certainty that she was on the verge of a step which would take her beyond his reach forever, might—she did not dare to word her faint hope. It was so faint!

Fontaine answered her letter at once.

“What’s this you tell me about the Chevalier Bayard of western politics? Now, that’s what I call jolly good news! When I go to congress—for I’ll get there yet—the senator’s lady will be on the ground, all ready to keep me from making ‘fox paws’ in my statesmanship, and to give me pointers on Washington forms and ceremonies. The biggest end of your letter is still rather mazy to me, though I’ve read it twice. But the fact that somebody else has thought about my marrying Miss Crandall, gives such an air of reality to the matter that I grow hot and

cold over it. Of course I am desperately in love, but I've not the faintest notion whether the dear girl has guessed it or not, or how she would feel about it. One thing is certain; I am going to find out, before I am many days older. With this in view, I must hasten several other affairs that demand attention, and guide this memorable assembly to a dignified close on the tenth."

This was the answer Edith received to her strange letter; a letter as sincere if not as disinterested as the one Doctor Atwater had written to Miss Crandall.

Atwater had said he was neither lover nor suitor, and he said it with truth. Lillian's answer of three years before had come from her frank, clear soul, and he could make no mistake about it. He had never seen a sign that her feelings had changed or ever could change, and with men, love starves when hope is dead.

Lillian sent no reply to his long letter, and indeed he expected none. He felt sure that under no circumstances would that letter ever be referred to by either. One bleak east-windy afternoon, some three days after the close of the

assembly, she got the letter from her desk, and read it again.

"There would be an end of all growth." Other sentences like that met her eyes. Perhaps it was all true, but what did it matter? She and Robert Bruce Fontaine were miles and miles apart, and would be thus always! The hungry cry of her heart was for a sight of him; the sound of his voice; the sense of his nearness.

Her father was smoking and writing in his room. She grew intolerably lonely. There was no one of her friends or acquaintances in the town whom she wished to see, but she must go somewhere, do something. Out near the factories lived several English families, whom she had come to know through the church. They were young couples, each with a cottage full of children. She liked to chat awhile with those cheery, busy mothers, and to lend them a little timely help now and then, with her needle or her purse. She resolved to pay her factory friends a visit that afternoon, and take a bag of goodies to the little folks.

The walk and the calls were a diversion; but on the way home her depression returned with

increased power. It began to rain, and she had no umbrella or other suitable protection, but she took a dreary satisfaction in her own physical discomfort, as she trudged slowly homeward.

She had left the mills and ascended a hill which overlooked the town. Her home was nearly a mile distant. A train which had been puffing steam and ringing its bell at the depot on her left, pulled out and went thundering away eastward. The suggestion of life and hope and courage inseparable from a flying express-train, was lost upon her. She was only dull and spiritless and dead tired with walking in this rain. At home there would be food and warmth and sleep; and that was what she would go on living for.

She turned a corner and came under an electric globe. A tall man with an umbrella crossed the street from the opposite direction and passed her. He strode on for a few steps, then paused and glanced backward. He caught a glimpse of her face, with its look of melancholy. She saw him as he turned, and her heart gave a great leap. Surprise overpowered her; she stepped

quickly forward, saying, almost under her breath:

"O, Robert!" He heard her by the motion of her lips. He was close beside her in an instant, saying as he caught her hand in his:

"Lillian, Lillian! Why did you call me that?"

She was under his umbrella, her hand in his arm, still tightly held.

"Lillian, darling, why did you call me so?"

"Because it is your name, and I like it."

"You like it! You have thought about my name, and about me!" he went on breathlessly.

"O, I could kiss your feet! You are thoroughly wet, my child. No mackintosh or umbrella, and walking slowly. I saw you a long way off, but wasn't sure till the light struck you full."

He was thoughtlessly walking at a pace she could hardly keep step with.

"But how odd to meet you in this way," she gasped, "as if you had come down with the rain! Where are you going?"

"I am taking you home, wherever that is. I have not been in this town before in five years, and I've no earthly business in it now, only to see the girl I love, and hear her call me Robert."

His voice was full to breaking, with his heart's tenderness.

"And you came," she said, "on that train that passed me back there, and that I *hated!*"

They both broke into a nervous laugh over the inconsequent remark. And then he noticed her dripping dress again, and her thin boots with only the protection of sandals.

"This is the way you girls take care of yourselves! O, I wish I dare pick you up and carry you! Don't be frightened, dear, if I talk like a crazy man. Lillian, I have been wild about you for weeks! I don't know how I stood it out to the end, through all that distracting hubbub in the House, when the thought of something about you, your eyes or your hair, or the crook of your little finger haunted me every moment. And you are not bored by what I say—not angry or sorry because I love you so?"

She lifted to his face a look which silenced him for very rapture.

On the threshold of her home, she called herself together, and conducted decorously indoors the guest she had found in the rain, and introduced him to her father. Before the dampness

was out of Lillian's crinkled hair, Mr. Crandall knew that he must give up his child

It is irrelevant to this narrative, just what his estimate of Mr. Fontaine might have been. That he considered him genuine, was evinced by his answer, when on the following day his consent was formally asked.

"When a child of mine loves, nothing could justify me in intruding objections, but the clink of base metal."

CHAPTER XX

During the two days which Mr. Fontaine spent with his betrothed, they were constantly together, and except at meal hours, alone together.

"Why don't you urge me to remain longer?" Bruce asked Lillian, when on the third evening he told her of his purpose to go to the hotel for a few hours sleep, and then take the midnight train for the capital.

"Are you tired of me?"

"No," she replied, "but you know when you ought to go; and two whole dear days are perhaps long enough for a lover's visit. You have filled me full of happiness, Robert, and when you are gone I shall have such memories!"

"What will you remember, dear?"

"Such a man to ask questions! Why, I will think of your looks and tones, and the things you have said, or half said—for you leave your sentences unfinished in the oddest way—and of sweet moments like this—so close I can hear your heart beat and feel your breath."

"We haven't talked much."

"Nor made any plans," and she laughed softly.

"Except the one grand plan which includes all others. We are to be married in May. Lillian, one year from to-day you will have been my wife for ten months. You will be quite used to me then, and perhaps a trifle weary of me. For I am not much of a fellow, after all."

"You are the only man in the world who could have taken possession of my entire being, spirit, thought and sense. I don't know much about you, Robert. I am half frightened when I think that it is less than ninety days since I first saw you. But God was good, to let us come together. If we were to part to-night, and never meet again, I should know that I had tasted the dearest bliss of life, and be thankful."

Those were almost the last words she said to him. She tried to speak of other things, but he would smother the words on her lips with his kisses.

Fontaine returned to the capital on Saturday forenoon. After he had lunched, he went over to the State House for some papers he had left

in the speaker's desk, and while there he called upon Governor Townley, in his private office. The latter met him with exuberant cordiality, and before he departed, told him of his engagement and claimed his congratulations. Edith had entirely disabused the governor's mind of the idea that his acceptance meant Fontaine's disappointment. She was broad and honest in that matter, where some women would have been petty and false.

"Miss Norgate is a very warm friend of yours, and I confess to having been a little afraid of you at one time," said the complacent governor. And Bruce laughingly responded:

"At all events, the time for such fears should be forever past. Your confidence, governor, shall be repaid in kind. I expect in a few weeks to marry Miss Lillian Crandall."

The governor was profuse in expressions of pleased surprise, compliments and good wishes. Fontaine interrupted him to say that it would be his own first duty and pleasure, to assist in shaping affairs in the party so that when the senatorial contest should occur, two years hence, Governor Townley would be the man upon whom

the lot would fall. To this his excellency responded, that it would give him great pleasure to allow the lieutenant governor to serve out his unexpired term of office; and he had no doubt Colonel Spooner would be entirely willing to do so. Then the two men shook hands and parted.

On Sunday morning Mr. Fontaine went to church, as many a man has gone before, chiefly because it would please the woman he loved. He reached St. Stephen's a little late, and the service had begun when he entered. A gowned usher conducted him to a pew already occupied by a young girl of sixteen and a younger boy. The girl handed him her prayer-book open at the Jubilate, and took another herself; he followed the service without difficulty to the end of the prayer. When the rector began to intone the Commandments, he was all at sea. The rosy-cheeked girl saw it, and exchanged books with him. At the Gospel and Epistle she changed again.

"It's a puzzle how anybody can keep the run of this," he said to himself, and added with a glow at his heart:

"It will be easy to learn, when Lillian is the teacher."

How happy he was that day! Every impulse and aspiration was toward the highest and best. Edwin Booth is remembered to have uttered this aphorism:

"No man can be called truly happy, till he is able to rejoice in the prosperity of his enemies."

If Bruce Fontaine thought of his enemies that day, as he walked the city streets, it was with the utmost kindness and good-will. He could have rejoiced in their prosperity. He looked forward to his future with glad anticipation, and then turned his thoughts to the past, recalling the impulsive boy who had married Louise Lombard, bewildered by the charm of her blonde beauty, and oblivious to her last hour that she was but a spoiled, petulant, wayward child. In the afternoon he went out to Meredith Heights, the sacred place where, amid firs and cedars and memorials in marble and bronze, the dead take their long rest. Standing by the white stone that bore the name of his girl-wife, he thought:

"It is not difficult to believe in a future life,

when a man remembers how many different lives are his here on earth."

As the evening approached, he thought of Atwater and determined to see him. The doctor was spending a few days with a scientific friend, engaged upon one or two interesting experiments in microscopy and chemistry. Over a week had elapsed since the end of the legislative session. He knew when Fontaine left the city, and guessed whither he had gone. He delayed his own return to Ellersport from day to day, he hardly knew why. He had seen Fontaine that morning at church; the latter did not happen to see him, and he let his old friend go his way, without giving him a sign of recognition or greeting.

Fontaine hunted him up that Sunday evening. With boyish frankness he spoke of his engagement, before he loosed the doctor's hand, and was congratulated in the most proper and fitting words that any man could have chosen. Atwater was cordiality itself and did not let the conversation flag for an instant, while the speaker remained. They talked of the events of the past winter, of the governor's prospective

marriage, of McNulty and his unaccountable moods and actions. Fontaine led Atwater to speak of his scientific studies, and began to perceive, for the first time in his life, what a living delight a purely intellectual pursuit may become. They spoke of Mr. Crandall, Fontaine tolerantly, the other sympathetically. Not till his visitor rose to go, did Atwater recur to the subject uppermost in the thoughts of both. Then he said:

"You have won a prize, Bruce; it is to be hoped you know how to value it. There is no animal so selfish and stupid as the human male; and sentiments which would hardly bear the daylight might be thought fine enough, by one of our blundering species, to match those of a girl like Lillian."

The words sounded cynical and harsh. Fontaine waited a little before he said, in a voice hardly like his own:

"I do not pretend to be good enough for her, or to entirely understand her. But she loves me, and I could lay down my life in gratitude for that. I have a strange feeling of wishing to make some great sacrifice, because—I hardly

know why, unless because it would make me more like the Christ she worships."

He had, for an instant, uncovered the secret place of his soul, and was ashamed that he had done so. He turned away quickly, but not before Atwater had given him a look of perfect comprehension. At the door they shook hands, a little lingeringly, and Fontaine started down street with his usual brisk step and manly bearing, a figure to challenge attention among a hundred.

It was snowing heavily again, and the falling flakes made a dangerous coating for the ice beneath. Just as he reached his hotel, a sleigh drawn by two black horses dashed up to the curb, in front of the main entrance, and a tall, active man alighted. His face, hidden by the broad collar of his ulster, could not be seen, but there was a familiar look about the lithe, graceful figure. The horses tossed their smoking heads and pawed the hard street, and a colored boy came running, in answer to a whistle from the ulster, and took them by the bits. Their driver entered the hotel, just in advance of Mr. Fontaine, and going direct to the clerk, he made a few hurried

inquiries. Bruce was near enough to hear the replies.

"Yes, Mr. Fontaine is in the city. He still has rooms here, but went out an hour or so ago. Ah, there he is, now."

The young man turned quickly, and met Fontaine with a low ejaculation of joy, or at least of relief. It was Mark McNulty, and he was in a state of strong excitement.

"I am so glad to find you!" he said. "My brother Swithin—he is drinking again, heavily. If he is let alone, he will be where he was a month ago, and then nothing can save him. I've hunted him for two days, and came upon him to-night, at a place on Tower Street. Ferd Slicker and Jim Dent were with him—low wretches, whom I'd like to kill! I want you to help me get him away from them."

"I'll help you cheerfully, all I can" said Fontaine, "but I hardly know how to go about it. Mack has thrown me over, utterly. I used to have some influence with him but not lately. The other two men I would have to knock down and walk over. Dent was the State House custodian, whom I removed. He would as soon

shoot me as not, but is a great coward. Where shall we look for Swithin now? There is no time to lose."

"They have gone to a private dive that Slicker has something to do with. It is south of Capitol Square. I shadowed them there this evening; then I got this team. It is asking a great deal of you, Mr. Fontaine, but you are a strong man, and so am I. We must get my brother away, if we have to do it by force. I can take care of him, when I get him into my rooms."

The wind was rising, and Fontaine went up stairs for a heavy coat, like Mark's. Then the two went out to the sleigh together.

"We'll take this bub coon with us, I think," said Mark. "There's no telling where we may have to go or stop, and he will be useful at the horses' heads."

"The little devil will freeze," said Fontaine; "he's not half clad."

"O, I'se all right," said the darky. "'Tain't col' much. Ride all night fer a quarter."

"Do you know the town?"

"You bet! Yous can shake me anywhers, w'enever yous troo wid me, an' I kin shin home."

"Wait; I've a plaid in my room," said Fontaine. "We'll pin him up in that."

He went back into the hotel with long, fleet steps, and soon returned with the plaid, which he proceeded to arrange, hood-fashion, over the colored boy's head and around his body, fastening it in place with the clasp-pins which were sticking in it. It was the kind act of a gentle heart. Mark McNulty remembers it, when he thinks of that night.

They got into the sleigh, with the little negro behind, and Mark gathered up the reins and turned the horses' heads toward Capitol Square. They had driven perhaps three blocks, when a two-seated sleigh, containing four men, crossed the street in front of them.

"There's our crowd!" exclaimed Mark. "They have something new on foot." He turned when they turned, and followed them. Without speaking, he tracked them for an hour through the city streets. They had a hired team and driver, and were getting their money's worth out of the rig, before dismissing it.

Their winding, zig-zag course took them down town into questionable quarters, Mark still keep-

ing them in sight. They were all too much intoxicated to perceive that they were followed. They stopped at length, where the lights shone out from one of the notorious buildings of the city, vaudeville play-house, dance hall and gin-mill combined. The three men got out of the sleigh lumberingly, and swaggered toward the arched entrance, when McNulty, who was on the outside, felt himself seized by the arm and drawn backward.

"Hello! Mark, me lad, not quite so fast," he said.

"Come, Swithin, I want you to drive with me," Mark said persuadingly, yet firmly.

"Who the hell are you?" asked Slicker, squaring himself between them and their sleigh.

"I am his brother, and I am going to take him home."

McNulty tried to free himself from Mark's hold, and then Fontaine's strong grasp was laid upon him, and he was shoved and half lifted into the waiting sleigh. Just then Dent recognized Fontaine. He aimed a drunken blow at him, which missed, then ended a string of shocking oaths with the question:

"Whose brother are you?"

Fontaine had McNulty on the seat in a grasp of steel. He was elated over his capture, and gave a little laugh of triumph, as he answered:

"I am every man's brother—yours, Jim Dent, if you will."

Mark's hand was on the dash-board, his foot on the fender of the sleigh, when quick as a flash Dent snatched the reins and sent them flying over the horses' heads, at the same moment giving the animal nearest him a brutal kick. The frightened team flung off the little negro like a leaf, and darted away, swift and uncontrolled as the wild night wind! The inevitable came soon. At the first turn the sleigh struck a telegraph tree, and the two men were hurled into the street. The one rolled like an inanimate bundle out of harm's way; the other fell, stunned and helpless, in the track of a cable-car, flying over a grade.

In the black throng of people, who, a few minutes later moaned and sobbed and shuddered over a man's form lying on the snow, some one was heard to say:

"I wonder if God cares, when a thing like this has to happen!"



The two men were hurled into the street.

CHAPTER XXI

Lillian asleep, miles and miles away, heard in her dreams a cry of mortal pain, and started up bewildered, calling out in the darkness:

"Robert! Robert! where are you?"

She lay awake through the long night, trembling with fear and dread. At dawn a telegram came from Doctor Atwater.

"Come at once. Fontaine has met with an accident."

Two hours later she and her father were on their way to the city. At a certain point on the road, news-boys boarded the train, with the morning papers; and with the cruel sun shining full on the page, Lillian read the glaring headlines:

"Appalling accident. Hon. R. B. Fontaine fatally injured."

Mr. Crandall took the paper out of her shaking hand, pulled down the window-shade and

held his daughter's face against his breast, for the remainder of the journey.

She was not permitted to see her lover alive. An hour before she reached the city, he breathed his last painful breath in the arms of poor Mark McNulty.

In the night he regained consciousness for a time, and they heard him say faintly:

"Dear little girl! God help her!"

Atwater stooped and kissed him like a woman.

"Bruce," said he, "you know you are dying?"

The other nodded.

"Mr. Lawrence, the rector of St. Stephen's, is here." Fontaine looked up quickly, and asked:

"Would he baptize me?"

"Yes, gladly, if you desire it."

"I do. It would please her."

When asked concerning his preparation, he replied:

"I repent of all my sins, and believe in the eternal goodness of God."

The solemn rite was quickly performed. He did not attempt to follow the Creed, but he repeated the Lord's Prayer distinctly to the end. Then the consecrated bread and wine passed his lips for the first time and the last.

Atwater forgot nothing. When Mr. Crandall and his daughter reached the city, the Hollis carriage was at the depot awaiting them. Lillian was received by Dorothy and Mrs. Colby. She could not go direct to the hotel, where he was. There was a throng of people there. The whole city was shocked and curious. Reporters were coming and going. They had to tell her everything! She must go home with her sister. In the evening they would take her to see him. She obeyed silently, tearlessly. They gave her food and put her to bed, and soothed her with infinite tenderness. She was like one driven out of a burning house, dazed and shivering, into the darkness of the night.

Just after nightfall they drove with her to the Helicon House, and led her quickly to the chamber of death. The sight of his face in its sublime beauty and peace called forth no outburst, but seemed to lift her out of herself and fill her with a silent, wondering ecstasy. She looked as long as she pleased; and, after she had covered the frozen hands with hers, and chilled her soft cheek against the ice of his, it was not into Dorothy's arms or her father's that she cast her-

self; but it was to Atwater, the friend who understood her like a mother, that she turned with the piteous cry:

“O, John, my heart is broken!”

Her sorrow was very great and very lasting; but it was easier to bear and to behold, than the remorseful agony of Swithin McNulty. Before the ambulance came that bore Fontaine from the scene of the disaster, he was sober and sane, with a horrified comprehension of all that had occurred. His abused system collapsed under the shock of this dreadful event, with which he was so painfully connected. He lay ill with brain fever, till his recovery was despaired of; but he rallied at length, and came back to life and a redeemed manhood. When he again appeared among men he was altered in look and manner, and liberated forever from the thralldom of his baser appetites.

Three years after Fontaine's death, Atwater, unexpectedly to himself and to her, asked Lillian again to be his wife, and she consented.

“I have been such a trouble to you, with my illness and worries; and you have been so bound-

lessly good to me! You could take care of me easier, that way, I know—and papa would be overjoyed.”

Such was the form of her consent.

It is the Fourth of March, and a new administration is inaugurated. As usual there is a ball in a vast room of the public buildings at Washington. The scene is a brilliant one—decorations of blue and gold, ropes of smilax, banks of roses, a uniformed band, a shining floor and a throng of high-strung men and ladies—light, fragrance and beauty everywhere.

Opening off the splendid dancing-floor, through flag-draped arches, are several luxurious little withdrawing rooms, which, after the grand march, fill with people who do not choose to dance. In one of them stands a noticeable group. The central figure is a handsome blonde woman looking under thirty-five, dressed in turquoise brocade, with a bunch of amber-colored orchids at her belt. She is distinguished in society for her wit, intelligence and good-nature, and is spoken of as the beautiful Mrs. Townley, wife of a western senator. She is talking spir-

itedly with those about her, and her few fine diamonds are matched by her shining eyes. Not far away stands the senator himself, conversing with a friend. Some one asks the lady:

"Who is the gentleman speaking to your husband—the tall man with the young-looking face and gray hair?"

"That," she replies, "is Judge McNulty, the new congressman from our ninth district. And there," she continued, with a little gesture of surprise, "are some other people from my State. I must go and speak to them." Passing under the flags are the couple to whom she refers—Doctor and Mrs. Atwater. A few moments later Edith is speaking to Lillian and hearing her say:

"Yes, we are on our way home, after a five months' absence. Last autumn my husband talked up a weak chest for me, just to give me the most delightful winter in the south, loitering along the Gulf coast and cruising among the Antilles. It is a little early to return; but we will remain a month in Washington and then follow the spring northward. Yes, my father accompanied us on our journeyings. Yonder he stands, talking with an old friend, Professor Ziemsen of the Smithsonian."

Mrs. Townley looks in the direction indicated and remarks that Mr. Crandall is looking well. He does indeed seem rejuvenated. His rugged Carlylean face has a healthy color, and it seems probable that for another twenty years he will enjoy life, in his own carping, sarcastic yet genuinely human way.

An hour passes, and Atwater asks:

"Are you tired, dear one? Shall we go now?"

And Lillian replies:

"O, no, not quite yet. It is lovely here, and the music is delicious!"

The tall, elegant figure wearing velvet and rubies, standing in a graceful, motionless pose, is one to challenge admiring notice. Many turn to look again, but she is utterly unconscious. A soft smile touches her lips; a dreamy light is in her eyes. She sees another inaugural ball, in a western capital, far away. She is living over another festival night—the night ever dearly memorable, when she met and danced with the Speaker of the House.

THE END.

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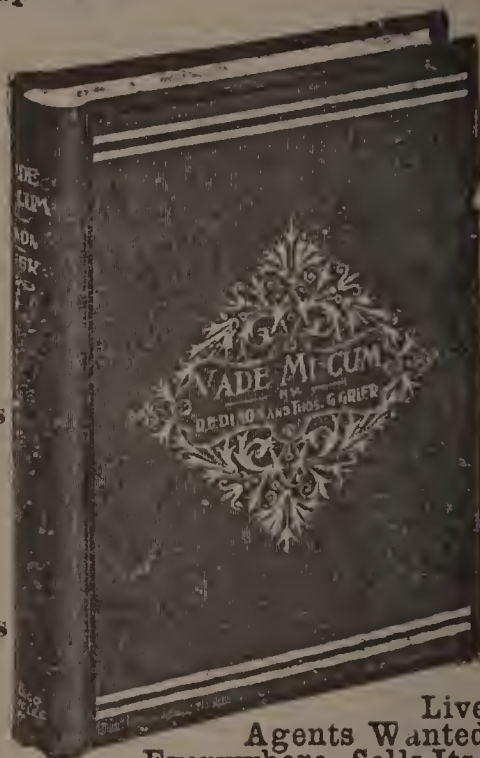
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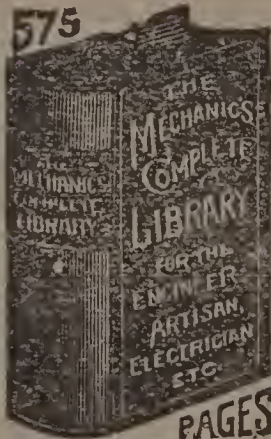
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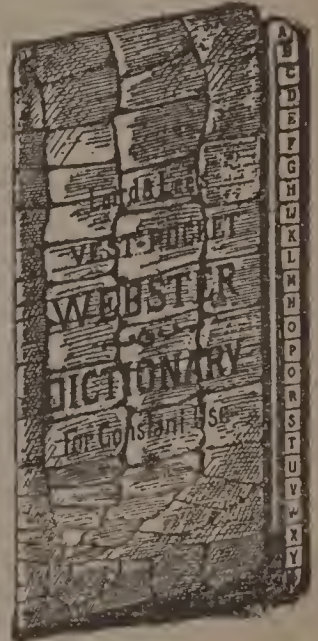
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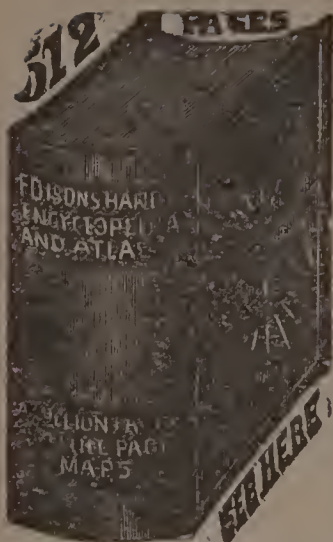
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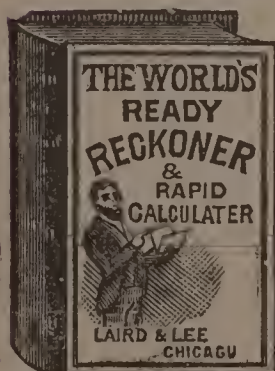
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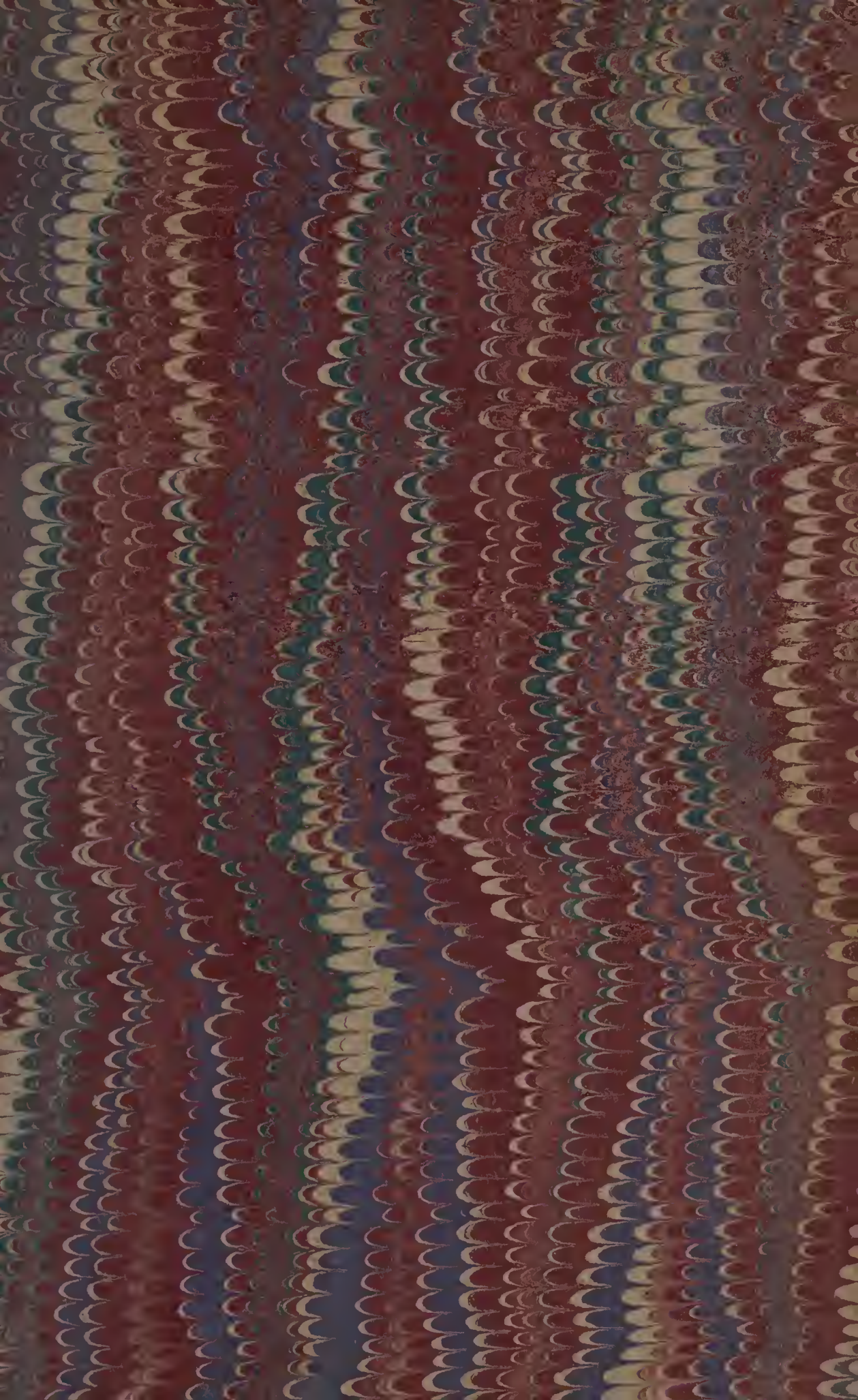
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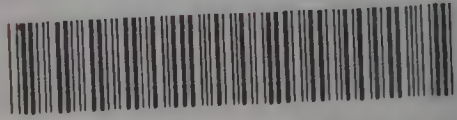
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